

the toni erdmann issue





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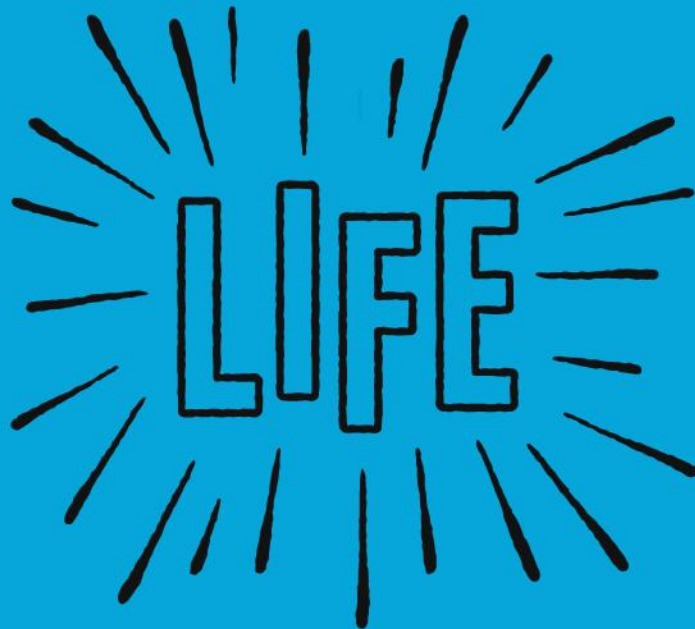
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**I'M TONI...
T-TONI...ERDMANN.
NICE TO MEET YOU.
MY PROFESSION?
I'M A BUSINESSMAN,
CONSULTANT AND COACH.
MY FOCUS...?**





Toni Erdmann

Directed by **MAREN ADE**

Starring **PETER SIMONISCHEK, SANDRA HÜLLER, MICHAEL WITTENBORN**

Released **3 FEBRUARY**

Maren Ade made two stunning films that largely passed audiences by. Her third not only confirms her sublime talent, but stands as one of the most brilliant comedies of the new millennium.

Though it might be hard to imagine, there exists such a thing as film critic grunt work. It's the equivalent of clearing out the mess hall or hosing down the latrines. One of these menial but necessary tasks involves reiterating why the late Japanese director, Yasujiro Ozu, is one of the all-time grand masters of cinema. His 1951 film, *Tokyo Story*, often scrapes the heady peaks of the increasingly-regular 'best movie ever' polls. But there remains a contingent who don't quite see the appeal of the director's delicate, deliberate and minor-key domestic comedies.

Grabbing for the pithy but reductive response, Ozu is one of a very small handful of filmmakers who truly comprehends the fraught emotional bonds between parents and their children. More specifically, how these bonds begin to fray and desiccate with time. He is able to look at the dynamics of a relationship from both directions – from youth up to adulthood and vice versa. And he doesn't just understand these bonds, he knows how to articulate them, to visualise them, to dramatise them, to make them appear like the truth.

On the evidence of her third feature, *Toni Erdmann*, the German filmmaker Maren Ade now clinks saki cups with that select coterie of prodigiously gifted screen humanists. Her film tells of perpetually corpsing father/career practical joker, Winfried Conradi (Peter Simonischek), and his straight-laced daughter Ines (Sandra Hüller).

His attempts to bridge a gap that has formed between them are futile. The possibility of future reconciliation appears dim. And so, like some unwieldy, maverick psychoanalyst, he decides to assist the apple of his eye in a search for lost time. He physically delves into her subconscious, craftily chipping away at layers of accrued memory. *Toni Erdmann* is the story of what it takes to remember, and what it takes to want to remember. It is the most epic and profound of all journeys.

The title of the film is heartbreaking in and of itself. Without giving too much away, you could also call this film *Rosebud* and it would have a similar, headily nostalgic effect. It's the codeword to a secret life or a private joke. You can image it being the name of a daffy local character that Winfried would joke about when walking through the local park with a knee-high Ines. Or perhaps it was just a random alter-ego invented as a way for a father to cheer up his daughter whose shark-like determination meant she had no time or inclination to make friends.

Either way, the utterly devastating component to this film is that we know the events we are seeing have happened before in the past. There is a seemingly throw-away sequence involving a designer cheese grater that, in the context of the central relationship, is loaded with hidden messages and meanings. This film is an attempt to recreate a more innocent moment in time, when unalloyed happiness existed. Like when Charles Foster Kane dived about in the thick snow drifts with his trusty sled.





“Toni Erdmann is a film in praise of the human factor. Director Maren Ade loves people, and she also loves love. She shows how difficult it is for people to shed their skin.”

Ade's excellent debut feature, *The Forest for the Trees*, arrived in 2003. Filmed on ugly, abrasive digital video and set in the comically uninspiring climes of Baden-Württemberg, Germany, this merciless character study bulldozes the dreams of a young, newly independent school teacher who is utterly unaware of her extreme social awkwardness. In many ways its heroine, Melanie Pröschle (played by Eva Löbau), could be seen as a forerunner to *Toni Erdmann's* Ines – both are driven women willing to sever family ties in the name of professional success. Where Melanie spectacularly disintegrates at the

point of flying the coop, Ines, with all her moxie and confidence, busts through and, for better and worse, lays the foundations of that coveted second life.

Some might see this film as the story of a bored, selfish father swaddling his daughter for idle pleasure. Or, maybe it's a study of how a daughter is somehow “cured” of her tough-nosed ambition by being forcibly regressed to the innocence of childhood. Maybe you could say that the film is against women in the workplace, especially those who might back-burn their femininity for the purposes of ascending the corporate ladder. Yet it is all and none of these things. Watching *Toni Erdmann* is like witnessing a deft balancing act, where every nuance is calculated and weighed with immaculate precision. Ade suppresses partisan politics, or anything that might be construed as the search of a more righteous cause. It's not about Winfried, and it's not about Ines – it's about the untenable emotions that connect them as people.

It's a film that feels like every frame has been minutely calibrated for effect. And at the same time, it's sprawling and free and open to the idea that these types of relationship are sometimes incomprehensibly elaborate. Scenes spin out and spin off. Yet the cast remain acutely aware of Ade's mission. Hüller, an actor who made waves way back in 2006 as the star of the harrowing possession drama, *Requiem*, delivers a performance that's comparable in its hyper-focus and thrilling intensity to Gena Rowlands when she's working with John Cassavetes. The stunning Simonischek, too, channels a comedy that just comes from being as normal as possible. The technique is evident, but you can see that they are completely lost within their characters. This is pertinent, as the film is about people losing themselves within false identities, reaching a point where they forget who they once were.



The story sees Winfried springing a surprise visit on his unsuspecting daughter who works for a management consultancy in Bucharest, Romania. The steady, nervously relaxed set-up offers a painfully accurate take on the awkward, dutiful family visit. Winfried just wants to bask in the glow of his successful daughter. She, on the other hand, has to succumb to ritual humiliation in the name of robust business practice. She has no time to indulge her prank-happy papa as he festoons her with gifts and attempts to instigate life-affirming conversations. Then, just when she thinks she's in the clear and able once more to focus on the job at hand, a Dickensian ghost from the past returns to haunt her.

Toni Erdmann is a film in praise of the human factor. Ade loves people, and she also loves love. She shows how difficult it is to shed your skin, to stop performing and return to a natural state of being. Business presentations are preceded with detailed strategic pow-wows that attempt to second-guess the psychology of others in the room. Ines has to make snap decisions when it comes to how she'll act in the company of her father, what she'll reveal, how she'll manipulate him, if she needs to. Little does she know, he's doing exactly the same to her. Ines becomes an emotional extension of her job – distant and numb to the realities of her actions. Ade doesn't present the company Ines works for as a fortress of corporate evil, but she does suggest that this type of work can have a damaging effect on those involved in carrying out practices that ruin lives. It is a banal sort of evil that seeps, unnoticed, through the dank air and into your bloodstream.

What's also miraculous about this film is that it takes Hollywood over its knee and gives it a sound but instructive whupping. Guys, the whole hauling in fourth-rate stand-up comics who are more than willing to abase themselves for low coin, placing them in front of the camera and just letting the improv magic happen is not working. It's lazy and

an affront to a paying audience. Ade builds jokes, she doesn't just throw a bunch of random shit against a shiny surface in the hope that something sticks. And yet, there's a distinct fondness for and overlap with mainstream Hollywood comedy. Ade toys with the idea of dramatic signposting, dropping in a suggestion which causes the synapses to guess what will happen later on. She undercuts those predictions in a variety of surprising ways, but also makes them remember how invested we are in these people.

Looping back to the beginning, let's talk about Ozu's *Tokyo Story* once more. It is a melancholy film in which two parents grudgingly accept that they are no longer integral to the busy lives of their children, and so drift into nothingness. Here, Winfried is made to consider his own mortality when his mutt, Willy, shuffles into the bushes and keels over. The difference is, he rallies against the abyss. Maybe *Toni Erdmann* is an absurd modern rejoinder to Ozu, expressing the lengths needed to rebuild a parent-child connection that has diminished over the years. It's incredibly sad to think back to the person you once were. And you can do it, but only if you're willing to smile in the process.

DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION. *Director Maren Ade has made two excellent (if little-known) films.*

5

ENJOYMENT. *As great as you've heard, and probably even greater.*

5

IN RETROSPECT. *An all-timer. Maren Ade – welcome to the table.*

5



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FUNNY Business

THE GERMAN DIRECTOR MAREN ADE REVEALS HOW SHE QUIETLY WENT ABOUT MAKING ONE OF THE GREAT FILMS OF THE 21ST CENTURY.

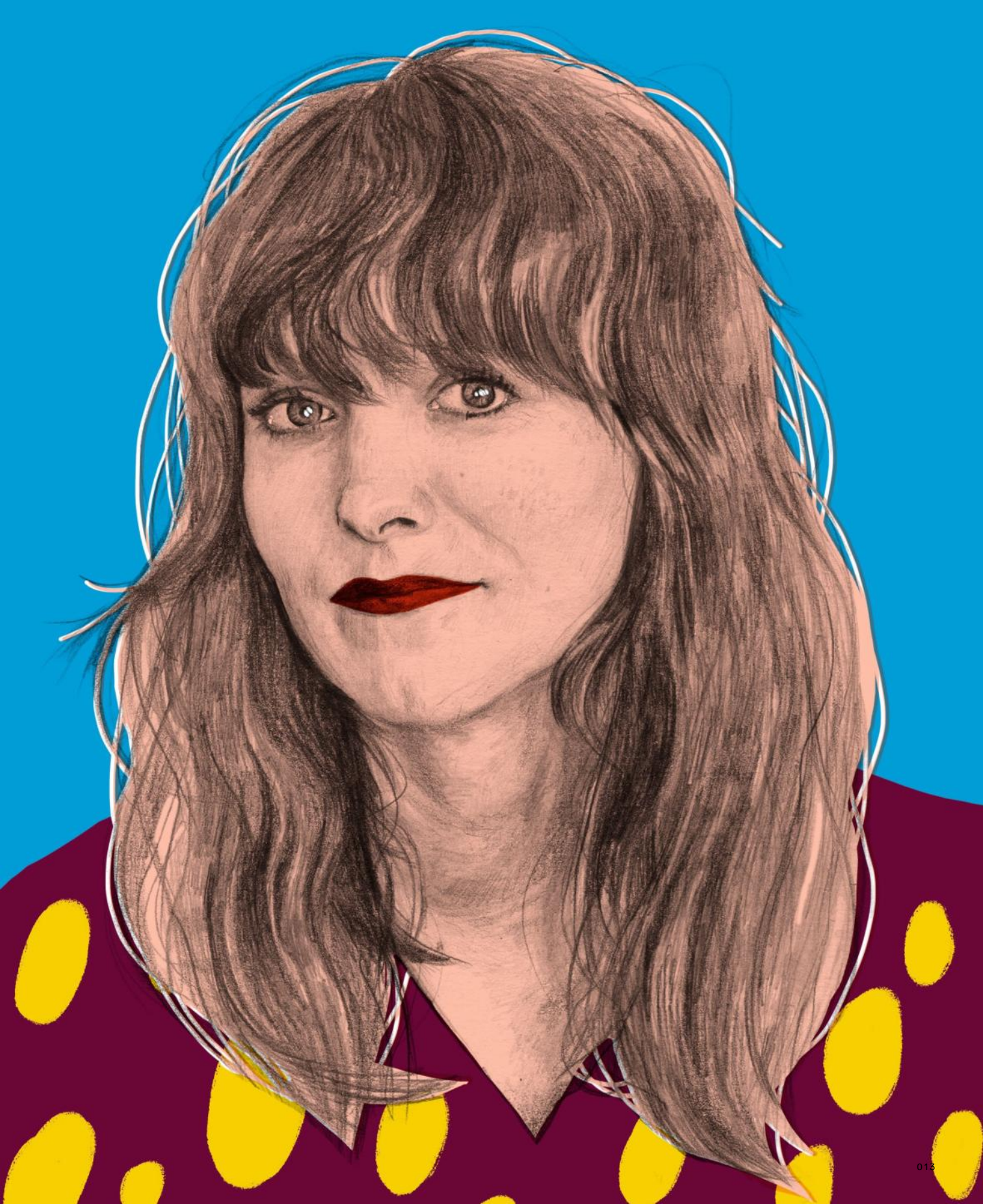
Following the 2016 Cannes world premiere of her third feature, *Toni Erdmann*, German writer/director Maren Ade became an instant celebrity. The film concerns a father who goes to absurd lengths to regain closeness with his daughter. Its maker spends years gestating ideas, playing the long game of producing only a few, highly-refined movies a decade, as opposed to cranking them out annually. Her features, to date, reveal an interest in character dramas powered by observations on the bungling ways that humans – sometimes comically, often painfully – try to connect with those closest to them.

Her debut *The Forest for the Trees* from 2003 is a deadpan study of adult loneliness and alienation channelled through wide-eyed, well-meaning schoolteacher, Melanie Pröschle (Eva Löbau). The more desperately Melanie tries to find a companion, the more it eludes her. To compound this, her total inability to read social cues leads to a string of excruciatingly awkward rejections. Later, in 2009, came *Everyone Else*, a meandering summer story about Chris

(Lars Eidinger) and Gitti (Birgit Minichmayr) who are sexually compatible but struggle for mutual understanding in other areas. The abiding enigma of whether they will stay together or drift apart makes for an open ending that holds answers without giving them away.

On to the film that transformed Ade from a respected arthouse director to an exalted icon of the scene: *Toni Erdmann*. Deserving of its plaudits by virtue of masterful pacing that causes three hours to fly by in a throng of hilarious situations that move towards a hard-won harmony between a father and his daughter. When we meet Ines (Sandra Hüller) she is a stressed and serious businesswoman, who is only exasperated when father Winfried (Peter Simonischek), camouflaged in false teeth and a wig, begins introducing himself to her colleagues under the alias 'Toni Erdmann'. Undeterred by his daughter's reaction, Winifred persists in long-haul pranking. Simonischek's physicality – hulking yet poised, with dark eyebrows that sit under white hair – contributes to an air of good-natured buffoonery. Performance wise, Hüller is tenser and tauter, but the pair share a certain restraint that reveals a subtle sense of the unspoken respect pulsing between them.

We spoke to Ade back in October 2016 on the day of her BAFTA Screenwriting Talk during the London Film Festival. Interviewing her is a complex pleasure, one that offers the opportunity to mine her rigorous technique and emotional savvy. It leads to an understanding of how form influences content, creating a fascinating reflection of the interests buried within her films. →



“WITH TONI ERDMANN, FOR EXAMPLE, I’M DOING A FILM ABOUT A FATHER/DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP AND I DON’T HAVE ANY TIME TO CALL

My PARENTS”

LWLies: You make films about the complexity of human relationships. Does it make those relationships any easier to handle in real life? **Ade:** A film for me is something that shows what I was thinking about the last five years, or sometimes three or six years. I discover things about myself. The films transform with what happens in my life. You cannot say it's like this or that because I had this or that experience, it's more that it gets richer the longer or the deeper I go into a topic. It feels like digging a hole and I come out somewhere else in the end. But actually, it's also sometimes very stupid. With *Toni Erdmann*, for example, I'm doing a film about a father/daughter relationship and I don't have any time to call my parents. Doing a film like that you could also become like Ines, so you have to be careful. There's always a risk.

How do you give yourself over to making your films good while keeping life good? That's the thing. Films sucks a lot of energy out of you. When I do a film I give up part of my own life and that's not always nice. That's why it takes so long [to put out features] because I try to put a relaxed life in between. I have two children now, aged one and nearly five, and that's a very good thing because there's no discussion, you need to be in the moment with them.

When you're dedicating yourself to life, does it get to a point where you grow restless to make your next film? The moment I start doing something or the moment I have an idea I feel I will always go until the end. So, I said to myself that I really want to take a break now, after *Toni Erdmann*, just for a year or something. I finished the film with a small child, now and I need some time. I said to myself, 'I'm not allowed to start writing something down' because if I start I will continue. But actually there's a lot of joy to making a film. There are so many different phases and not every phase is equally tiring. With the writing, you're very free in how you spend your day. And with editing it's the same. It's just this thing in the middle – the shooting – where it feels like you go on an oil platform. You're completely gone.

Do you remember where you were when the idea for *Toni Erdmann* landed in whatever form? I don't remember that. It goes back very far because since a long time ago there was an interest in doing something about family, or family structures.

What was that interest in family structures inspired by? By my own family. My father is someone who also likes to joke. He has a good repertoire. It always interested me what he's doing with this approach to life – to solve things with humour on one side and, on the other, how people react to him. This family thing is always an interesting topic because it's a lifelong relationship so it's very heavy. It's hard to escape these roles. You don't know where they really come from. It goes back so far into childhood.

If you're naturally fascinated by a subject, that's a good motor for you to address it in a film? That's good. 'Naturally fascinated'. [Ade makes a note] That doesn't personally interest me but *beschäftigen*... where I feel the need to say something about it that emotionally drives me.

What is 'beschäftigen'? *Beschäftigen* is things that you think about a lot.

Like obsessions or fixations? Nah, that's too much. It's in between thinking and being obsessed. Sometimes in different languages you don't have a word.

At what stage in the writing process do you bring in other collaborators? I'm writing alone and I enjoy that very much. [Ade makes a note.] 'Writing alone' is good. I'm sorry! I've got that BAFTA talk and I didn't prepare the intro so during the interview when something comes into my mind I have to write it down. So, I enjoy writing alone, but at a certain point I show it to several people and I also have one, the actress in my first film, *The Forest for the Trees*, who played Melanie Pröschle, the teacher? She's a friend and she was a dramaturgy consultant on *Toni Erdmann*. We met and talked about what interests us, our families and the script. I always alternate between being alone with my subject and my script, and then I open it to the rest of the world – I go out, I do research, I give it to people, I try to see films. When I'm writing I'm completely into it and I'm trying not to analyse it.

That's great, so you don't judge yourself when you're writing? Yeah and that's what's important. I really try not to judge myself and I try to write down everything even if it feels stupid or not serving the plot or the script. Even if it's like a completely different idea that maybe doesn't really fit in at first sight. I try to be creative you know?



HOW TO BE
INCOGNITO

“DIRECTING IS SO OFTEN JUST ABOUT ARRANGING PEOPLE, CHAIRS, GLASSES AND A CAMERA UNTIL YOU REALLY COME TO THE POINT WHERE YOU CAN WORK ON EMOTIONS.”

You have these two big, rich characters in Ines and Winifred. How do you build up smaller characters and make them compelling?

I try to be equally interested in them as in the main characters. Actually, I think it comes out of the fact that I'm interested in the characters and not in the plot as much, so I'm thinking of working out of the situation – 'What is the biggest need for a character in this situation, even if it's a side character?' and, 'Where does he come from?' and 'Why is he saying what he's saying?' and 'What is he hiding?' This is the story for me. The story is not, 'How do they solve the problem they are discussing?' It's more the dynamic between two characters. It's always about hierarchies or the status between characters.

Do you let yourself be influenced by your collaborators once you're building a crew and once you've cast your characters?

The actors always bring something in so you have to work with them, for sure. But with *Toni Erdmann* and all my other films, although they feel improvised, it's 95 per cent a written script. The actors learn the dialogue. The dialogue is something that I try to make as natural as I can. It's something that I hear.

Is that because you listen to people? I don't know. Maybe. I don't know if I'm such a good listener. At a certain point I allow the actors to improvise a little bit and then I feel, 'Ah no, it gets unprecise, so please, let's stay with the script.' Sometimes I'm so obsessed that I let the assistant control each sentence so that we're really sure that nothing is forgotten. Improvisation always makes things longer, and often the actors have the feeling that they have to be inventive and that they maybe have to put emotions into the dialogue. That's something that I don't like so much. I like it more when the emotion happens on a sub-level and the dialogue is often very banal.

Something that's fascinating about your films is that at the same time as you're showing very naturalistic situations, yet there's always emotion underneath it.

That's a process. The dialogue and the staging is something that I prepare with the actors before the shooting day. That's something that is planned. They learn the text. We meet before. I try to always get a rehearsal on every location, which is really important. Directing is so often just about arranging people, chairs, glasses and a camera until you really come to the point where you can work on emotions. It takes a while and sometimes you don't have enough time for that on a shooting day. I try to leave something open for the shooting day to be able to surprise the actors with ideas of what happens on the sub-level. The sub-level work is tiring for everybody because, for me, it works better when you have to repeat it more often as it's much harder to hit.

The thing with directing in general is if you say how you want it to look, in the end you almost never get that result. If you have a very good actor, he can do that but imagine you say to someone, 'You sit there and feel sad.' Imagine how you would play that yourself. You would sit and play sad. [Ade mugs exaggerated sadness]. Sometimes you need adjectives to direct. You nearly always need to find a better reason for the actor, and it's good when you have an active verb, where it's really something going on inside of someone. Like saying, 'You're not sure if you're going to leave', 'You're afraid that you might start crying'.

I like when a scene is rich on the sub-level. I think that we often do things that we don't want to do. For example, Winifred, he buys that cheese grater and he knows it's a very bad present. It's the fifth bad present he has bought, and he knows all about this present, but still he has to go through and give it to someone. Immediately, you have a much more complicated scene. With that scene it seems very simple. She gets a present from her father. She should be happy. It's nice to get something. Still, it's very annoying that it's a cheese grater. She's not saying it. With family so many things are ritualised. People cannot escape. There was always a conflict going on.

When you describe the cheese grater scene it sounds so melancholic, but then it's so funny.

For us in the end, yeah, but for them it's not funny! With a scene like that, it's just the fact that he's giving her a cheese grater and the dialogue that is funny, that he's saying the flight was cheap, cheese grater and that's it. It's not a funny scene. Definitely not when we were filming. Maybe watching it behind the video monitor I have a feeling that it will be funny in the end but in the first place it's painful.

Is it funny for you that Toni Erdmann is categorised as a comedy?

Yeah, he plays comedy in the film but the reason he's doing it is completely drama. It's very desperate. He's doing what he's doing out of desperation and it's the same for Ines. I'm happy that it's a comedy 🍷



INTERVIEW BY DAVID JENKINS
ILLUSTRATION BY TIMBA SMITS

DENTALLY *Challenged*

The
FINEST
AND THE
MOST
'UNUSUAL'
False **TEETH**



Featuring
7
NEW
STYLES

WHEN IT COMES TO MAKING FALSE TEETH
FOR MOVIES, NO ONE BEATS GARY ARCHER.
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FINEST SCREEN CREATIONS.

YOU MAY NOT KNOW THE NAME BUT YOU WILL HAVE SEEN THE WORK. GARY ARCHER IS AN LA-BASED BRITISH EXPAT WHO WORKS AS ONE OF HOLLYWOOD'S GO-TO GUYS FOR PROSTHETIC TEETH. HIS COMMITMENT TO QUALITY HAS ALLOWED HIM TO RETAIN HIS STATURE WITHIN THE INDUSTRY FOR DECADES, AND ANY JOB THAT INVOLVES TEETH IN ANY WAY, SHAPE OR FORM USUALLY FINDS ITS WAY TO HIS DOOR. HE MAKES HIS OWN IMPRESSIONS WITH THE SUBJECTS AND HAS REFUSED TO SUCCUMB TO THE SHODDY METHODOLOGY. HERE, ARCHER TAKES UP THE STORY ON SOME OF HIS MOST MARVELLOUS CREATIONS...

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MRS DOUBTFIRE (1993)

"I was born in London. I came over to the US in 1976 with my father. We ended up in this dental lab. I went to work for my dad in 1983 or '84, and I was with him... forever. He retired a few years back and I took over the lab and have worked there ever since. We started doing film work in '94, '93, whenever it was, and we've been going ever since. I apprenticed for five years, learned how to be a dental technician and was quite happy being a dental technician. We were contacted by a make-up artist who was referred to us by one of our dentists. They asked us if we could make a set of teeth that would fall out of somebody's mouth and into a glass of water, and that was one of the first jobs we ever did. It was for Robin Williams in *Mrs Doubtfire*. They liked what we did, they told someone else, who told someone else. I don't really have to advertise because my name is out there. It's been out there for many, many years, and people just sort of find me."

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VAMPIRE FANGS



BLADE (1998)

"Making fangs isn't much different to making normal teeth. Everything is articulated with moulds, so we know exactly how the patient's jaw connects together. Then we make the fangs accordingly. They look good and can function as fangs, and the actor can also speak with them. That's the biggest thing – the talent has to be able to speak and act. The key is making teeth that are comfortable and that they can work with. They mustn't suddenly have a speech impediment. Everything is done with dental articulators and dental models, so we take all those important aspects into consideration. In terms of giving safety tips, obviously we say that these teeth are just for acting, they're not for everyday running around in, they're not for eating, anything like that. They are just for appearance."

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**FUNNY
TEETH**

AUSTIN POWERS: INTERNATIONAL MAN OF MYSTERY (1997)

"I saw something on the BBC website, I don't know whether it was last year or this year, where they were talking about quintessentially bad British teeth. On the page they had a picture of Austin Powers. Someone forwarded that to me, and I said, I think I'm responsible for propagating this myth about bad British teeth. When Mike Myers first came to me on this, he said, 'I want bad British 1960s teeth'. There's an English pub out here where I live in the Valley and a lot of English expats are in there. And so I basically looked at a lot of the smiles from the clientele there. I just modelled Austin Powers on two or three different people that I used to drink with in this pub. I took pictures, I made sketches and then came up with a design. And straight away Mike loved it. He said that I'd absolutely nailed it. So we ran with it. He made those teeth famous. In the third movie, which is set in modern times, he has his teeth all fixed up. Yet without the real, bad teeth in, he isn't Austin Powers. He's just Mike Myers wearing a pair of glasses and a colourful costume, which isn't the same. So they always made him go back in time, so he could have his bad British teeth again. They were integral to the character."

"YOU'LL FORGET YOU'RE WEARING THEM"

NIXON

BRAND

"CROOKED"

Nashers



NIXON (1995)

"Which teeth am I most proud of? All of them really. The fangs for all of the major characters in *Interview with a Vampire* would be one example. Teeth for Anthony Hopkins in *Nixon* would be another. Making those was interesting. We used pictures of Nixon himself as inspiration. Hopkins, along with the make-up people who designed the prosthetics, described to me what his teeth looked like. His four front teeth were fairly white, his side teeth were fairly yellow. They wanted to go ahead and match that, and I said that would be easy. And so we made the teeth for him. He liked them so much he would put them in and forget that he was wearing them. He'd go off for lunch, would eat with them in and shatter them. And then he'd bring them back to me and say: 'I'm terribly sorry Gary, I've broken the teeth', in that lovely Welsh accent of his. And he's a lovely man. A lovely, lovely man."

NEW

ALL-ACRYLIC 'PERFECT' TEETH

"BLINDINGLY"
WHITE
VENEERS



THE WOLF OF WALL STREET (2013)

"Jonah Hill, who stars in *The Wolf of Wall Street*, doesn't have particularly great or white teeth, but he wanted to have these perfect white veneers for this film. So we made him perfect white, straight veneers. Blindingly white. All acrylic teeth come in different colours. It's the same acrylics that we use for normal dentures and things like that, so we just used the same material and colours that are found in the dental industry. We try to stay away from paint and things like that because that type of stuff is not necessarily health-safe."

OG HOMIE'S Choose NPG BRAND



SPRING BREAKERS (2012)

"I worked on Harmony Korine's *Spring Breakers* It was for James Franco. We made some gold grills for him. They were actually a metal casting. Usually you use real gold, but the production company didn't really want to shell out \$2,000 for an ounce of gold at that point, so what we used is another metal that's called NPG, which stands for non-precious gold. It's a gold coloured alloy, but when it's cast and polished it looked almost identical to gold. It just doesn't have the properties of real gold."

Free
PAIR of
"CRAGGY"
TEETH

WITH

EVERY ORDER OVER 50c



THE FREE STATE OF JONES (2015)

"I just did a set for Matthew McConaughey in *Free State of Jones*. He was wearing prosthetic teeth in that film to make them look like they were not his own perfect, white Hollywood set. That's one of the problems: all the Hollywood A-Listers have got absolutely perfect teeth and they look way, way too perfect to be believable. Especially if they're playing a Civil War officer in the 1860s. So what we have to do is make the teeth look regular, make them look 1860s. If you look at the pictures, you can see that they look very un-Matthew McConaughey."

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Hunt for the Wilderpeople

FROM TAIKA WAITITI, DIRECTOR OF
WHAT WE DO IN THE SHADOWS
AND FLIGHT OF THE CONCHORDS



AVAILABLE ON DVD & Blu-ray Disc 16TH JANUARY

Experimental Comedy

EXTRAVAGANZA!

— FEATURING —



UN CHIEN ANDALOU

by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí
(Eye-ball-slicing lulz)



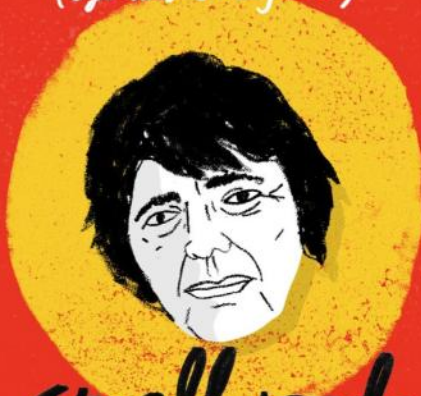
BLEU SHUT

by Robert Nelson
(Makes you see the hilarity of clock watching)



WIDE ANGLE SHUT

by Owen Land
(Mockery like you've never seen!)



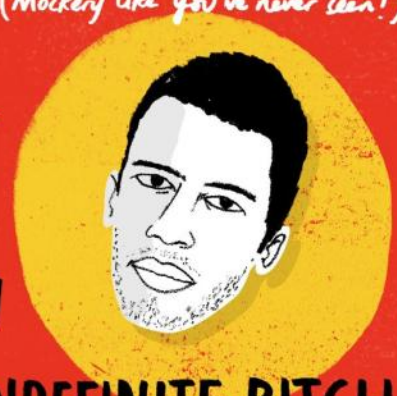
small roads

by James Benning
(Benning's funniest film)



WAVELENGTH

by Michael Snow
(45 minutes of zooming hilarity!)



INDEFINITE PITCH

by James N Kienitz Wilkins
(The Airplane! of structuralist cinema!)

Punch LINES

IS IT ACTUALLY POSSIBLE TO LAUGH AT EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA?

In September 2014 an online zine named 'OtherZine' published a short text penned by Toronto-based filmmaker/programmer Clint Enns called, 'A Series of Questions for Experimental Film and Video Programmers'. Little more than an unnumbered list of 26 tersely-phrased propositions disguised as queries, Enns' piece ruffled a few feathers and was well-circulated, as it implicitly accused contemporary experimental media curators (and, in turn, the media's makers and their audiences) of upholding an avant-garde community that is noxiously exclusive, opposed to genuine risk-taking and devoid of humour and pleasure. "Is fun only reserved for after the screening has finished?" asks the 22nd line.

On one hand, it's a claim that glosses over the reality that, for a certain type of viewer, the discovery of a rigid, formally-rigorous masterpiece can itself be fun, insofar as 'fun' is understood as an occasion for some form of enjoyment or pleasure. But for the most part, a reduction in the breadth of voices and sensibilities within this community are central to Enns' grievances. Experimental cinema (or, if you'd rather, the "avant-garde") has withheld its reputation as a predominantly stuffy field since sometime around its inauguration as a verifiable *tradition*.

To the casual observer, it's a niche with its head nestled high in a cloud, lofted comfortably above the institutional pleasantries of meaning making and entertainment. Its funny bone, if it has one at all, is anesthetised by a tourniquet strategically tied just north of the elbow. This is not inherently a criticism; beauty is always in too-short supply in cinema, and we really should not begrudge those who take it upon themselves to rectify that. However, it's clear that aesthetics of contemplation and difficulty have long held the highest stock value here. In short, the avant-garde is not a house of mirth.

To many ears, then, the prospect of a funny avant-garde film probably sounds like an oxymoron. Whether you're going into a work that's forwardly formalist, poetic, or political in its approach, dazzling (and perhaps tedious) visual abstraction is the unofficial avatar of the experimental film 'genre', and that hardly promises to deliver the lulz. It's easy to forget, however, that the avant-garde tradition – currently or historically – isn't purely dominated by late-modernist Romantics. Maya Deren, Kenneth Anger and Stan Brakhage are the most cited pioneers of the tradition (at least among the American wing), but the lineage goes back long before them. First you pass through guys like Norman McLaren and Oskar Fischinger, then the Surrealists, and, well before them, the early cinema frontiersmen who, prior to narrative becoming the norm, were making films for the pure curiosity of seeing images of movement and action. →

HUMOUR is always subjective, and this has made attempts by theorists to study and explain the nature of comedy seem as tireless as may be futile. This endeavour becomes even more difficult when an experimental film is the case study, since jokes and punchlines are so often reliant on causality; humour, it seems, is fundamentally tied to narrative. That said, one of the more convincing explanations of humour, the 'benign violation theory', compellingly presents a broadly-drawn claim that's all-encompassing enough to be used in discussions of the avant-garde. According to this conception, humour presents itself when there is a threat or violation of our position or understanding of the world, and that threat is ostensibly benevolent. When these two conditions are satisfied, we may be compelled to laugh at the threat instead of fearing it.

When it comes to experimental filmmaking, then, we can imagine that a film, no matter how abstruse, could upend a certain understanding or expectation that we have about the world and the way it is kept in order. Finding it funny merely becomes a matter of being able to grasp and understand the terms of the context that produced it, whether that context is internal to a given film (the set of formal rules that it follows), or external to it (those broader cultural, political or aesthetic conditions that informed its production).

The Surrealists, for example — such as Salvador Dalí, Luis Buñuel, Germaine Dulac, René Clair, Man Ray, and Jean Cocteau — made films with little fidelity to reality and logic. None of them made outright comedies, but they all consistently and pointedly broke away from the stability of our world's material laws and moral codes. They instead tried to penetrate the unconscious via the uncanny and absurd. The world was recognisable, but off. In 1929's *Un Chien Andalou*, time moves irregularly, in zig zags and without consequence, while elsewhere an eyeball gets sliced open and ants crawl out of a living man's hands. In 1924's *Paris qui dort*, a man awakens atop the Eiffel Tower, finding an entire metropolis frozen in a literal standstill.



This manner of dream logic, which meant to expose those buried and repressed ideas hidden away in our minds, often tapped into the ridiculous and abject realms of human thought. The extent to which these ruptures seemed like threats was not always clear, though since the distance the films kept between themselves and reality was usually obscured, and in some cases impossible to discern. Many Surrealist films were, in the end, either cognitive experiments, flirtations with madness, or glimpses of those strange and alien realms of the material world that we rarely see. We know representations themselves can't harm us, and yet we were being shown a reality that appeared far less stable and ordered than we had previously understood it to be.

Subsequent decades were dominated by various introspective tendencies and movements that militated against Hollywood and its expensive production standards (namely, the psychodrama and the lyrical film). Yet this period, lasting from the '50s and on through the '70s, saw the arrival of a taste for irony, satire, and parody — the butt of the jokes often being the avant-garde itself. This was a time when filmmakers were taking sides, placing their allegiances either for a cinema predicated on the eye and psyche of the filmmaker, or for a new modernist tendency known as the structural film.

Emerging in the late '60s, structural filmmaking saw artists beginning to emphasise the 'shape' of their films' structures, and affirming the mechanics of the medium itself (eg its inherent flicker; the camera's capacity for rendering three-dimensional space; and basic kinetic gestures like pans, tilts, and zooms). Michael Snow's 1967 film *Wavelength*, one of the most iconic of all avant-garde works (structural or otherwise), is the epitome of this shift in concerns. Running at 45 minutes, the film is largely defined by its chief gesture: a slow zoom into a photograph on a wall at the other end of a very long loft. Closer to a horror film than a comedy (though *Wavelength's* description never ceases to make people sneer), Snow's masterpiece nevertheless flung a door wide open for the subsequent decade-plus of intra-community vitriol and not-always amicable homage.

For instance, Owen Land aka George Landow, who is about as close to a prankster as this community ever had, made a name for himself (hell, he made two of them) by ruthlessly mocking and critiquing the structural film and its modernist itch for medium specificity. His film 1975 film *Wide Angle Saxon* teases Hollis Frampton and his 1971 masterpiece (*nostalgia*), by featuring a film within the film called *Regrettable Redding Condescension*. A pun on the title of Land's own 1970 film, *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, *Regrettable* mocks the main conceit of Frampton's film (a static, black-and-white shot showing the methodical charring of a series of personal photographs), adding grotesque red paint into its diegesis, and fitting in a reaction shot of the film's audience: a man named Earl Greaves (and grieve, he does), crying from boredom.

The irony of Land's parodies, naturally, is that his films participate in the structural mode just as much as the films he roasts do. His imposing presence as a potential bully is mitigated by the self-critical wink on the other side of the camera. That he makes a great film arguably much worse and far stupider is part of the charm and appeal.

But many of the structural filmmakers were comedians in their own right. Snow has long been weak at the knees for a clever pun. The title of 1981's *Presents* alludes to everything from gifts to 'nowness' to the gesture of deliverance, and overloads its mise en scène and choreography with references to all of them. A couple of years later, in 1983, he made *So Is This*, which is nothing but white text on a black screen, whole sentences and thoughts coming at us one word at a time, sometimes at infuriatingly fast or slow speeds; common linguistic structures break down, teasing us by over- and under-loading our capacity for creating meaning out of abstract scribbles (letters of the alphabet). Robert Nelson likewise enjoyed toying with our expectations of the flow of time, as his 33-minute masterpiece from 1970, *Bleu Shut*, impudently ingratiates impatient viewers by placing a real-time clock in the upper righthand corner of the screen, relieving us from feeling the need to check our watches.

One could go on listing and describing them (honestly, they're much funnier if you see them for yourself), but it's better to return to the question of why – or, perhaps, if – this jocular sensibility disappeared from the scene or if it was merely buried and ignored as it became more institutionalised. James Benning's films can be good for a laugh – his 2011 film *small roads* turns the tired fetishisation of the American landscape into a wry game of Where's Waldo? via perceptible seams in his digital compositing of each shot. And I've seen the French, multidisciplinary artist Laure Prouvost's video-satires of plastic desktop aesthetics and late-capitalist kitsch have brought down many a house. But the gaps between these works, while often filled with works of eye-dissolving beauty, are growing, and the space for them in major film festivals – that is, the ones that get a spotlight, and therefore get press coverage, and therefore become part of 'the moment' – feels unbalanced. This isn't to say that these works aren't being made or isn't getting shown; the Winnipeg Underground Film Festival and the Strange Beauty Film Festival in Durham, NC, to name only two, have made it a major part of their mandates to provide a platform for work that believes that 'rigour' and 'fun' are not mutually exclusive adjectives.



“TO MANY EARS THE PROSPECT OF A FUNNY AVANT-GARDE FILM PROBABLY SOUNDS LIKE AN OXYMORON”

Then there's the idea that humour only emerges at moments when it's least expected. Films that squarely situate themselves in the comedy genre can of course be quite funny, but nothing beats the comedic instance that crops up out of nowhere, completely unawares. Experimental film aficionados were given such an experience during the projection of the last film in the fourth and final Wavelengths (experimental) shorts programme at the 2016 Toronto International Film Festival. At the tail end of a set of stone-faced splendours and austere curiosities, the audience suddenly found themselves laughing. Not chuckling under their breath, not snickering, but laughing, at times uproariously. The instigator was Brooklyn-based artist/filmmaker James N Kienitz Wilkins and his 23-minute film *Indefinite Pitch*, a black-and-white digital video comprised of nothing but still images of and around the Androscoggin River in Berlin, New Hampshire. Evocative of the final frames of *Wavelength*, the images of these slushy rapids are accompanied by a self-reflexive voiceover (which, speaking of *Wavelength*, becomes ever shriller as the film goes on thanks to incremental shifts in the audio pitch), wherein Wilkins quips about local arson attempts, childhood friends who became drug abusers, the difficulty of financing a movie, class disparity, and the comparative frame rate specifications of various video formats.

While many viewers in the audience were clearly enjoying Wilkins' cheeky, self-deprecating wit, the piece proved to be the most divisive in this year's Wavelengths selection – just as it reportedly had been a month prior in Locarno, and was again a month later at the New York Film Festival, where it won Wilkins the prestigious Kazuko Trust Award – prompting nearly as many walkouts as it did guffaws. “Unfunny,” “Bad,” and just a “Stand-up act,” cried the naysayers, while across the aisle others extolled it as “Hilarious,” “Dizzying,” and “A very probable masterpiece.” It is possible, no doubt, to love or hate *Indefinite Pitch* for reasons that have little to do with its sense of humour (or, for that matter, that it even has a sense of humour at all); it is an immensely dense and complex aesthetic statement, and it does many things well. What's helped make it such a resonant work, though, is that it is acutely aware that the trademark severity of the contemporary avant-garde space was long overdue for some good-natured ribbing 🍷



ILLUSTRATIONS BY LAURÈNE BOGLIO

KEY TO INTERVIEWS:

(EL) ELENA LAZIC (ML) MANUELA LAZIC (MT) MATT THRIFT

(AW) ADAM WOODWARD (DJ) DAVID JENKINS

(SMK) SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN



IN THE SPIRIT OF OUR COVER FEATURE,
TONI ERDMANN, WE'VE CANVASSED A SELECTION
OF FILMMAKERS AND ACTORS FROM ACROSS THE
GLOBE ABOUT HOW THEIR PARENTS HAVE IMPACTED
THEIR LIVES AND CAREERS.

DAVID LOWERY

Bursting on to the scene in 2013 with *Ain't Them Bodies Saints*, starring Rooney Mara and Casey Affleck, David Lowery's follow up is the lyrical live-action remake of Disney's *Pete's Dragon*, which is available on DVD and VOD in the UK now.

“I can't remember when I told my parents I wanted to be a filmmaker, but I can remember when I decided I wanted to be a filmmaker. I was seven and my mother had checked out some books from the library about how to make movies. I had expressed an interest in how *Star Wars* was made, so she found this book about it and took it out of the library for me. I remember the book was called 'Making the Movie'. And another called 'Lights, Camera,

Action' was a children's book about how movies are made. It took me ages to remember what they were called, but when I did I found copies of both on eBay. It was a really exciting moment to tell my mom, 'Look! I found that book that you got me that set me on this path!' It's a wonderful illustrated children's book about breaking up the process of filmmaking. That was the career choice I made and never wavered from. And they supported me. I don't remember actually going up to my mom and saying this is what I'm going to do with my life. But I do recall their undying support from day one, whenever that was. I'm the oldest of nine kids, and I feel that my parents have supported all of us in our endeavours, whatever they may be. I invited both of them along to the premiere of *Pete's Dragon*. It was an overwhelming experience because neither of them had ever been to Los Angeles before. As soon as it was over my dad said it was one of the best days of his life and then my mom sent me a really long email just outlining all the things she loved about it. All the little things.” *EW*



PAUL SCHRADER

One of Martin Scorsese's greatest collaborators, having written *Taxi Driver* and *Raging Bull*, Paul Schrader later moved into directing, with *American Gigolo*, *Light Sleeper*, *Blue Collar* and *Cat People*. His latest feature, *Dog Eat Dog*, stars Nicolas Cage and was released in 2016.

"I grew up in an environment where theatrical attendance was forbidden. A church environment. I didn't see movies and I didn't know anybody who did. So I didn't know I was missing anything. One of the things that first attracted me to films was the fact that they were forbidden. I went to some and they weren't very interesting, but then the European cinema of the '60s came along when I was in college. My parents never came around to it. When my father died, I was surprised to find that he had purchased all my films on VHS. They were all in their original wrapping, unopened. He wanted people to know he was proud of his son, but he wouldn't watch them. He had no real interest in my career, but then he suddenly started calling around the time *Last Temptation of Christ* was due to be released. He wanted to know about its distribution, how many theatres it would play in. The second time he called, I said, 'Dad, are you by any chance involved in the movement to block this film?' He said, 'Yes, but only locally'." **MT**

MARGARET SALMON

Margaret Salmon is an artist filmmaker and photographer whose beautiful, latest work, *Eglantine*, premiered in 2016.

"I think I was quite a confident child, so my parents left me to my own devices. There was nobody in my family with a background in art. I'm considered a black sheep, an oddball. I think they're proud of me. I've worked as a commercial photographer for places like the *New York Times* and *Newsweek* and travelled all over. I've done lots of things and they've always supported me. They're proud. It's probably different to, say, if my parents were filmmakers and they really 'understood' everything. They know that I work hard. I have friends whose parents were academics, which is probably a more typical thing. I like being in touch with the non-film, non-art world, and that's partially through my family. Not being too... self-obsessed? Looking inward within the art and film world, but understanding there's a lot happening. I don't show many people my films as I'm making them, including my parents. It's quite a private process. Once they're done, if they're interested I'll show them, but most of the time they've got other things to do. I don't make a very big deal about it. It's quite odd. It's more of a big deal if I shot a big job for the *Times*. This is quite a small thing, attuned to a very specific world. They'll watch *Eglantine*. When the time is right." **WJ**



**“AFTER MY MOM SAW
MY FOURTH FEATURE,
LOVESONG, SHE ASKED
ME IF NOW I WAS GOING
TO GET A REAL JOB.”**

— SO YONG KIM

SO YONG KIM

Lovesong is the fourth feature by this Korean-American indie director, best known for 2008's *Treeless Mountain* and 2012's *For Ellen*.

"I would have told you just yesterday that I don't think my father played any role in my route into filmmaking, but I've just realised that he absolutely has. By the very obvious gesture of buying me a camera. But also through other things. He's into sport, not drama. My mom was very obviously supportive and loving and caring. My father was... busy. He was a head teacher. Not good at talking his feelings out. But he spent hours trying to set up the computer that allowed me to edit. You can't fake that, you know? I guess in his own Methodist Protestant way, he supported me. My parents are divorced, our mother raised the three of us. She always wanted us to have traditional, 'respectable' jobs like a doctor or lawyer. Something stable. But maybe because she was pushing so hard on us I went in the opposite direction and became a filmmaker, I don't know... After saw my fourth feature, *Lovesong*, she asked me if now I was going to get a 'real job.' And she asked me that after each film. I'm like, 'Mom, I'm in my forties, I'm not gonna get another job'." **EL**

BEN A WILLIAMS

*Williams' career began with the acclaimed web series **Tube Tube**, comprising overheard conversations on London's Underground. *The Pass*, about gay footballers, is his feature debut.*

"When you're a child, you don't really know what tricks and sleight of hands are going on. I was always exposed to drama when I was a kid. My mother was always taking me to the theatre. We lived in London and she's got a keen eye for a bargain so we'd always go to the restricted view at the Apollo or things like that, just to get us there. Strangely, though, my parents weren't big film fans, I discovered film by myself while being quite well exposed to London theatre. But I studied drama at school and I went to drama classes and all that stuff, mostly because of my mom. At the same time my father is like, your typical gadget kind of guy. Always into technology and buying stuff. That imbued me with this fascination of the technological side which is an obsession with cameras and making film. And he bought me my first Sony camera, on which I made my first films. Which, ironically, he then completely deleted. The tape that I had all of them on. He recorded over them episodes of *Eastenders* and he never apologised." **EL**



JOHN WATERS

The cult American director whose films focus on the grotesque goings on in the city of Baltimore, Maryland. He counts trash classics *Pink Flamingos*, *Female Trouble*, *Hairspray* and *Serial Mom* on his cinematic CV. *Multiple Maniacs*, his experimental 1970 feature, has been restored and is set for re-release in the UK.

“My parents never saw *Multiple Maniacs*. It’s the only one they never saw. And when I saw it at the premiere I thought, ‘Oh, I’m glad my mother didn’t see this one’. My father paid for the movie and I paid him back every penny. He was speechless that I did so. He couldn’t believe it. It was filmed on their front lawn. Right at the beginning with the big top, that was their house in the background. They didn’t even come down to look. They just didn’t want to know. My parents learned to not snoop. Because in their early days they did and they didn’t like what they found.

“*Multiple Maniacs* is loosely based on the Manson family, but at the time we were making it, nobody knew who they were. When we made the movie, they hadn’t caught Manson. Really, the plot was that Divine convinces her husband that he committed the Manson murders to blackmail him, but he didn’t. But we didn’t know. They hadn’t caught Manson until that scene later on when they look at the newspaper. That was from that day. Suddenly the film didn’t make sense anymore, but even when we shot that scene, he said, ‘Who are these people?’ They weren’t famous yet. It wasn’t like the crime of the decade or anything. Like, he even says one of their names in it, ‘Patricia Krenwinkel, who’s this?’ They don’t even say the names right. And that was the real newspaper that came out. And I just said, ‘Now we can’t use that’. I had to do a rewrite when they caught him. But certainly at the time, when we shot it, they didn’t know. My parents were just perplexed by all of it really.

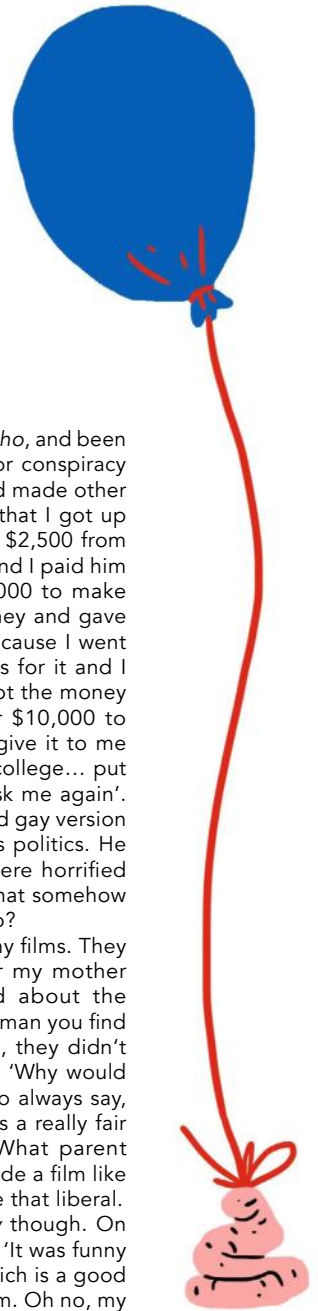
“But they were so incredibly supportive when I look back. Yes, because I had also filmed a scene in front of their house. For my early film *Eat Your Make-up* we recreated the entire Kennedy assassination with Jackie in the outfit and everything in the car. This was about two years after the real event. People around our neighbourhood were like, ‘What?!’ That crazy scene where Divine is walking around the neighbourhood and looks in somebody’s front window – that was my mother’s. We didn’t even ask. They could have been sitting there having Sunday morning breakfast.

“I had already made *Mondo Trasho*, and been arrested for making it. That was for conspiracy to commit indecent exposure. I had made other movies before that, so they knew that I got up to that kind of thing. I had gotten \$2,500 from my father to make *Mondo Trasho* and I paid him back in full. I then asked for \$5,000 to make *Multiple Maniacs*. He had the money and gave it to me. Then I paid him back, because I went around the country, I got bookings for it and I got it picked up. And, again, he got the money back. And finally I asked him for \$10,000 to make *Pink Flamingos* and he did give it to me and said, ‘Okay, you didn’t go to college... put it in your next movie. But never ask me again’. Which was really fair. I’m like a weird gay version of my father in a way. Only not his politics. He started his own company. They were horrified by what I did but they respected that somehow I was doing it. What else could I do?

“I never talked to them about my films. They didn’t want to know. Once, after my mother saw *Female Trouble*, she asked about the character Gater, ‘Is that the kind of man you find attractive?’ I lied and said no. No, they didn’t want to know. They were just like, ‘Why would you...?’ And Divine’s father used to always say, ‘What were you thinking?!’ which is a really fair thing to say to an adolescent. What parent would be happy that their child made a film like *Multiple Maniacs*? You just can’t be that liberal.

“My parents did love *Hairspray* though. On *A Dirty Shame*, my father said this: ‘It was funny but I hope I never see it again,’ which is a good line. No, they didn’t like any of them. Oh no, my mother liked *Serial Mom*. She always said, ‘That’s your best movie’. And it is the best movie. We had enough money, it’s like everybody is in it. I’ve got Dreamland people, I’ve got movie stars, it looks good. Yeah.

“I had a shrink who once said, ‘Your parents are the fuel you run on’. Of course. I was raised to have very good taste. On family matters, it’s worth mentioning that my uncle was undersecretary of interior for Nixon when we were making *Multiple Maniacs*. So think about that.” JJ



JULIA DUCOURNAU

Raw is Julia Ducournau's directorial debut, an art movie about teenage cannibals that received wide acclaim at the 2016 Cannes Film Festival. It's released in the UK in April.

"The first time I started watching horror movies, my parents didn't know about it. They were not there. There is always this thing when you get to junior high you start to share things under your coat. I remember trying to get into one of the *Freddy* films and I got kicked out of the cinema. It was funny because it made the experience more thrilling. No, my parents have nothing against my film taste at all. They didn't encourage me to watch gore movies, but they know a good movie when they see one. For example, *Psycho*, which is a horror movie, a slasher movie – I watched it with them for the first time when I was very young. It's a Hitchcock movie so it was okay. He's a master. It scared me, but it didn't traumatise me. It's the kind of movie that you see that has a deeper purpose. It was on VHS at home and we each had food on a tray. They are very big movie buffs. We would always watch something while eating. For example, *Eyes Without a Face*, what they see is that it's a very good movie. I watched it when I was a teenager, when I was a bit more grown up. They weren't into the *Freddy* movies, but they do have an open mind." *DJ*



PARK CHAN-WOOK

He is one of the founding fathers of new new extreme wave of South Korean cinema, leading the charge with his 2003 film OldBoy. His latest is called The Handmaiden.

**"I'M NOT SURE ABOUT
HERE IN THE UK, BUT
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A FILMMAKER IS THE
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A BEGGAR."**

– PARK CHAN-WOOK

"My mother and father liked very much seeing movies. I wouldn't say they were cinephiles, but nevertheless... When I was a child, before I was 10 years old, I would watch classic movies on TV on the weekend with them. They provided the basics for me. They were fundamental to my filmmaking. My father was an amateur painter as well as an art lover, and we would go to streets with a lot of art galleries too. They didn't oppose my becoming a filmmaker. I suppose you could define their support of my career decision as... lightly enthusiastic. I'm not sure about here in the UK, but in Korea, to become a filmmaker is the same as becoming... I'm not sure what the expression is... a beggar. My parents would come to the premieres of my movies, and they were able to handle them at the beginning. *JSA* was okay, but I think it was *Mr Vengeance* when they got a little shocked. But that film became something of a vaccine, so for the later films, they were immune to the violence. Maybe it's because of their old age, but when they see my films, they have lots of questions regarding the plot. When I started making films, my father told me: "Hitchcock is great, but with *North by Northwest*, I couldn't follow what was happening," so don't make films like that. With *The Handmaiden*, a lot of people tell me it's the easiest of my films to follow. My father thinks it's the most difficult. He missed a major plot point and it bugged him for the rest of the film." *DJ*

MATTIE DO

Supernatural horror story Dearest Sister is the second feature by this LA-based Laotian filmmaker.

"My parents weren't influential in my decision to become a filmmaker. I had no idea I was going to become a director. I never went to film school, I never went to university. I was a ballerina. I wasn't a very good one, so thank god I'm a filmmaker now. But my mother was super influential, in that she gave me this personality where it's like, 'if you want to do something, do it! And don't just do it, do it well!' She used to tell me all the time as a kid, 'You give up too easily! You don't follow through!' And I was a child, you know, all children give up too easily!

"These words stayed with me. And my father was a cinephile, but not in the way that you would think. He watched all the crappiest films. He loved them. He loved westerns and everything. He was an immigrant to Laos, and then we were immigrants to America during the war. But when Dad immigrated to Laos, he was so impressed with cinema there, especially Clint Eastwood and John Wayne. He was the son of a baker and he was too poor to go to the cinema, so he would sit on the street and sell popcorn in plastic bags until he got enough money to buy a ticket to watch a western." **ML**

KENNETH LONERGAN

Kenneth Lonergan is a prominent Hollywood writer/director known for films such as You Can Count On Me and Margaret. His latest is Manchester by the Sea.

"When I was very young I used to write science fiction stories starting in about fifth-grade. I used to show my mother everything that I wrote. She used to correct my spelling,

occasionally my grammar, and occasionally the content. Once she told me that there were too many explosions and shootings and ray guns and killings for her in one of the stories that I wrote. So I tried to put a more peaceful chapter in. But overall they were very supportive. I never had to overcome parental opposition, just some concrete financial worries that eventually went away.

"Both of my parents had to learn the etiquette of the theatre, which was that you don't come to opening night and criticise the actors in the play. You save that for later. There are certain times when you don't want to hear comments from anyone, you just want to hear, 'great job, congratulations', and there's other times when you want to hear people's honest opinions. And, as I got older and they got used to what I was doing, they'd talk to me about the material as if it was just any other film or play they'd seen, and that was always fun for me and I think fun for them...I hope." **DJ**

SHOLA AMOO

Shola Amoo's A Moving Image is a multimedia experiment that rails against gentrification in Brixton. It premiered at the 2016 London Film Festival.

"I never went to the cinema with my parents. I think, when you're young, you try not to hang out with them. Isn't that the thing? I'll tell you what, though, I remember watching a lot of films with my older sister, just random films like *Dirty Dancing* or *Coming to America*, and a lot of Bollywood films because she was into Bollywood. My parents played music, lots of King Sunny Ade, a Nigerian artist. A lot of that in the house, and I just love music. I played guitar growing up, and was into punk, into hip-hop, and I always felt like I'd be a musician. I think one thing you will notice about *A Moving Image* is that it's a very musical film." **ML**





**“EVEN AFTER SHAKING HANDS
WITH THE QUEEN, THE PRINCE
AND THE PRINCESS, MY
PARENTS STILL DIDN'T CHANGE
THEIR MINDS ABOUT MY
CAREER; IT WAS STILL WRONG,
DESPITE MY SUCCESS.”**

— PAUL VERHOEVEN

PAUL VERHOEVEN

*Director of RoboCop, Starship Troopers, Showgirls and many others.
His new film, Elle, is reviewed on page 48.*

“I was supposed to become a mathematician, which is what my parents wanted. So I went to university in 1956 and studied mathematics for seven or eight years. They were really counting on me being like my student friends and becoming a professor. They all did become professors, but I decided against it when I went into military service. I got put in the navy so I could make a documentary on the Dutch marines, and that's what started the film career. My parents hated it. Did they influence me? Yeah. They made me want to continue in the opposite direction. Never forbid your children from doing something, because that's all they'll want to do. They did everything they could to try to get me to return to mathematics, they paid for it and I finished my studies after all. They were always extremely disappointed by my career. They only came to my movies very reluctantly. The very week that I went to the United States to film *RoboCop*, my father cut out a newspaper advertisement for a part-time professor of mathematics. Interestingly, though, when I was a kid immediately after the war in '45-'46, my parents were avid viewers of the American movies that had just arrived in Holland. They went every week and would often take me with them, so they obviously liked movies but just didn't

understand that somebody made them. So it's their fault for putting me on this track, even if it took some time – until I was 24 or 25 – for me to change gears and become a filmmaker.

“My parents came to most of the premieres, although they wouldn't come to the opening of *Turkish Delight* because they'd found out that after one of the sex scenes, the religious female character says to the protagonist, Rutger Hauer, just after her orgasm, 'I miss God among us,' to which Rutger replies, 'I fuck better than God.' When my father found out that this line was in the movie, he told me I had to take it out because it was blasphemous. I told him that I wouldn't, that it came from the book the film was based on, so he told me he'd never go to see the movie. And he never did. My mother went to see it in secret with my aunt. They were there for my other 'decent' movies, though, like *Soldier of Orange*, where they met the royal family. Even after shaking hands with the Queen, the Prince and the Princess, they still didn't change their minds about my career; it was still wrong, despite my success. My father died just before *RoboCop*, so he never got to see any of the American movies, while my mother died in the aftermath of *Basic Instinct*. So they never got to see *Showgirls*.” **MT**

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HOPE DICKSON LEACH

The Levelling is the feature debut of this Glasgow-based filmmaker, set to open in the UK in 2017.

"I didn't know what a filmmaker was when I was growing up. I'm still not entirely sure to be honest. But I loved going to the movies. It was a precious space for all the usual reasons, but also because it was something that my father and I shared in particular. My mother has always worked in the arts, so I think probably while they saw early on that I was going to end up doing something creative, I imagine they were concerned with the precarious lifestyle it offers. Having said that, they are incredibly supportive of me in many different ways and that means everything. It makes it possible. In terms of influencing my work, I can't deny that my films tend to be about families so even though there was no formal grooming of me as a filmmaker, the complexities of family life have been inspirational.

"I grew up in Hong Kong and there weren't that many English-language or English subtitled films available to me at that time, so I repeatedly watched the video tapes we had in the house. These were American, mainstream and lots of fun: *Star Wars*, *Dune*, *Top Gun*, *Bugsy Malone*. But I was taken to the theatre a lot, and to lots of ballet. We read a huge amount, so my love of stories is totally inherited from my family. *The Levelling* is very much concerned with the relationship between a father and his son and daughter – the resentment, misunderstanding and frustrations that can sometimes appear, but most of all, the love. My mother came to the London screening and loved it. She's very proud. My father lives in Canada so hasn't seen the film yet, but we will watch it together at some point soon. I expect there will be tears." **EL**

JOACHIM LAFOSSE

This Belgian director has been making intense family-based dramas for over a decade. *After Love*, starring Bérénice Bejo and Cédric Kahn, is his most recent.

"I decided to work in film the day I realised what becoming a filmmaker would mean for me. That memory is this: when my parents got separated I was seven or eight, the age of the twin girls in *After Love*. There had been very few words. We didn't talk about it. It was my mom who told us. My dad wasn't there, which wasn't great. And then, all of a sudden, two weeks later, *Kramer vs Kramer* came on TV. And so my twin brother, my mom and I watched the film and started talking about it. I realised, some 15 years later, how much we had talked about our situation, thanks to the film.

"Cinema, and art in general is absolutely indispensable because it allows us to talk about ourselves, without saying it's us that we're talking about. It gives us a kind of modesty, and allows us to talk about things with meaning and without vulgarity. I can no longer stand politicians because, actually, in the end, they talk more about themselves than about reality. Works of art offer the possibility to talk about us without saying it's us. And so, obviously, there are many intimate things that have lead me to making this film, being a twin and the stepbrother of a twin since my dad had twins with a twin.

"By the way, I have another memory that made an impression on me: around the same time as when I watched *Kramer vs Kramer*, I went to see *ET* with my father, and I was Elliott's age. My dad told me how Spielberg worked on set, and that same night – I remember the dream – I dreamt that I was invited on set and that Spielberg was asking me to direct the little dwarf that was in *ET*'s costume. And in psychoanalysis, 15 years later, I remembered this, and let me tell you..." **ML**

JOHN MICHAEL MCDONAGH

War on Everyone is the most recent feature by the writer/director of **Calvary** and **The Guard**.

"My parents are classic Irish working class – they just want me to get a good job in the bank, back when getting a job in a bank wasn't a totally corrupt idea. You don't hear that anymore, because everyone thinks they're just rapacious pricks, which I guess they are. My dad was a labourer and my mum was a cleaner. Me and my brother were lying about the house on the dole going, 'no, we're going to become great writers'. But initially I wanted to be a novelist, and being a few years older than Martin, I would've been bearing the weight of expectation. I still remember coming back from a job at British Telecom which I quit after a day. I came home and my mum burst into tears. They couldn't really understand it. Although, I suddenly found out there's a writer in my mum's family. I think there might have been a painter, but nothing on my dad's side. I was on the dole maybe three years and that's when I did my early writing. They just think, you're going to waste your life. You're never going to get a job.' Speaking to them since, my mum definitely feels a little bit of guilt about that. But how could they know their two sons would go on to become filmmakers? My brother had the early success as a playwright, how could they possibly predict that? They had no experience in their family before.

"I remember going to see *Pinocchio* with my mum, but I would usually go with Martin. You'd be seven years old and go down to the pictures in the morning on your own or with your brother. I don't know if that still happens now. My dad was from Galway so when I wrote *The Guard* I had all the specific locations pinned out. That film became so successful that my mum got a bit jealous, so I said, 'I'm writing this one about a priest. I'll set it where you're from in Sligo.' I knew all those places, so it was a great nostalgic feeling to go back to the place you'd spent those endless summer holidays. So they influenced the films in that way. I wouldn't expect my mum to like *War on Everyone*. I think she found *Calvary* a bit too bleak. My dad would just watch a film as a film. My mum would try to see if there's any reference to the family. I know they were pleased about the success of *The Guard*, because it almost became a phenomenon in Ireland. They were pleased about that, and at that point they realised I was probably going to be alright." **AW**



DAVID OYELOWO


This British character actor has tried his hand at just about everything, and most recently appeared in A United Kingdom and Queen of Katwe.

"My parents didn't want me to be an actor. Nigerian parents tend to be far more academic-focused. My parents had three boys. They wanted a lawyer, an engineer and a doctor. The arts, acting, that was just not on the table. In realising that what I wanted was different from what my parents wanted, I then went hell-for-leather and ended up going to drama school. Once I started to gain the kind of success that my parents never envisaged for me, they couldn't have been more encouraging. It fills me with deep pride now because they are watching their son do that which they thought was impossible, especially with the nature of all the films I do. *Queen of Katwe* is a film I've recently done that's set in Uganda and is an unapologetic African story about an 11-year-old chess prodigy. My dad saw that. As a proud African man, he was taken aback by seeing positive, three-dimensional reflections of his continent and his people, in a way that I know he hasn't seen before. And the fact that I'm a part of that is very, very meaningful for him. I remember the first time I ever went to the cinema. I think I was about four or five and it was to see *Superman*. My dad took me and he fell asleep and snored very loudly for the whole film, so I can't even remember the film, only how embarrassed I was at the fact that he was the new soundtrack to the movie." **SMK**

GEMMA ARTERTON

The British leading lady is on a roll and can be seen in the charming comedy drama, Their Finest, in April 2017.

"I was always a theatre actor and I used to do amateur dramatics as a kid. I loved it and my parents would always come and see everything. They were never very pushy parents either, which was great. And my mum was like, 'do whatever you love and we'll always support you'. And now my sister is an actor as well. I like the fact that they're very quietly watching and proud. But they're not all over it. They were never pushy-pushy, and it was always my choice. I think they were just happy that I was doing what I loved. My dad says that all the time now, that, 'you're so lucky that you do what you love for your job.' My number one passion is my job. Actually, no, my number one passion is music, but the second passion is acting. So I'm very lucky and that's what they always wanted – for me to be happy. I never talk about acting with my parents. Ever. I don't talk about my job at all. I don't take it home with me. I don't want to talk about it with them. I want to talk about life and real stuff. I also think it's a bit wanky to talk about it with people. I love talking about acting with actors, but not all the time. Dad sometimes asks, because I think he finds it very fascinating. But it's funny, my mum said, 'When did you make that film, you didn't tell me about that film?' That is how it is. It's my work. They don't talk about their work with me so I don't talk about my work with them." **DJ**



**“MY DAD USED TO GO TO A PLACE
CALLED THE ELECTRIC. BACK THEN, IT
WAS PRETTY BOHEMIAN. PEOPLE WERE
SMOKING AND FUCKING IN THE CINEMA.”**

– GABE KLINGER

GABE KLINGER

*Working as a critic, programmer and teacher for much of his early life, Klinger later moved into feature filmmaking with his 2013 documentary **Double Play** about Richard Linklater and James Benning. **Porto**, which premiered in 2016, is his fiction feature debut.*

“My parents were just kind of... encouraging. And they knew that I was interested in film from a very, very early stage in my life. They tried to nurture that as much as possible. It wasn't like nowadays where you have everything streaming. Well, not everything obviously, there's a lot you still can't access, but there's a whole lot of information that's just available at the click of a mouse. Back then if I wanted to see, say, *Battleship Potemkin* or some other kind of canonical movie from the history of cinema, maybe I had to order a VHS tape from another country, or wait until it came around to a local cinematheque. I had to be sure that I was gonna be free during that moment to go see it. To have access to that as a kid, you need an allowance. And maybe if the screening is late at night, you need to get special permission to stay out late. So there was always a discussion, and at a certain point, I exhausted their kindness, when I was 12 or 13. After I exhausted my parents' kindness, the only solution was to do something professionally related to film, so that I could access more films. So I did film criticism.

“My dad talked a lot. He lived in London at the end of the '60s to early '70s, and he'd go to the BFI – or, the NFT as it was back then. He would go to a place called the Electric cinema, I think it's defunct now... Back then, it was pretty bohemian. People were like smoking and fucking in the cinema. But I remember my dad had a membership card that he showed me for the Electric cinema, and I was like, 'oh that's cool, I didn't know you could have a membership to go to the cinema.' But my grandmother – I just have to mention her because she was the intellectual of the family, she was a painter and a writer – she showed me my first Jim Jarmusch movies. She said there's this guy, Jarmusch, and I said, 'sounds uncool,' you know, cause it's my grandmother giving me advice on films to see. And it changed my life. I think she gave me a VHS tape of *Mystery Train* and I was just like, 'oh, cool!'. And then she gave me Tarkovsky's book 'Sculpting in Time' and Ingmar Bergman's book, 'Images', and both of those books kind of changed me.” **EL**

MARK COUSINS

*Formerly a critic and writer, Cousins is now a multi-discipline media artist channelling a love of art and cinema into unique, confessional documentaries. **Stockholm My Love** is his latest.*

“I come from a very working class background, so there was no, sort of, cultural education. My dad liked John Wayne films and my mum loved Doris Day films. So they loved industrial, you could say 'escapist' cinema. A kind of utopian cinema, and I think I was influenced by that in that I have a sense of the joy that cinema can deliver. However, when I started to develop my own taste, it didn't come from my parents at all, because they were, I would say, anti-art, which is fine. So that meant that my discovery of cinema felt personal. It wasn't forced on me by my parents, nor was it even particularly encouraged. They thought it was a kind of silly hobby which would go away – this made it more special for me. So, where I was living in Belfast there were not many cinemas, but to see *Touch of Evil* by Orson Welles on TV, or to see Alfred Hitchcock's *Notorious* and particularly to see a film called *Force of Evil* by Abraham Polonsky – these films were like a kind of secret. They were speaking to me. A movie can feel as though it has a very direct address, and that's what happened in this case. So I would say there was no influence on cinema as an art form, at all. That was my kind of rebellious discovery for myself.

“They wanted me to have a good job. My dad was a mechanic, he fixed cars. They wanted me to have something more like that. I was quite bright at school, and so they could see maybe they thought I would be a teacher or something? I wanted to be an architect, they thought. I think, to be a filmmaker, from my background, from my class, was impossible. So I think they thought, 'He obviously likes that sort of thing, it gives him pleasure, that's fine, but of course he'll never, you know, become Alfred Hitchcock or anything like that. Therefore, you know, get real. At some point you're gonna have to grow up and become less childlike.' But, of course, to become a filmmaker you need to be childlike in some way, I think, have some instincts of childhood or play. So, only in the last ten years has my mum accepted that this is my job. But that's fine, you know. We don't need our parents' approval. Sometimes just to have their... so many people have been pushed by their parents into something that I had the freedom to choose.” **EL**



EUGÈNE GREEN

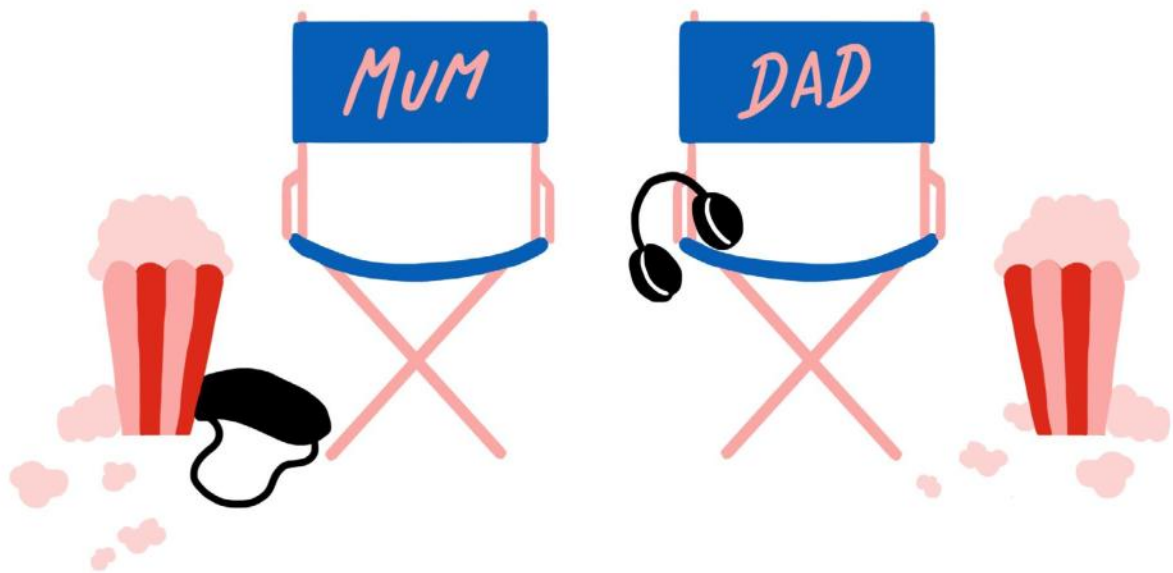
The Son of Joseph is the latest feature by this idiosyncratic director who is most widely known for his 2009 film, *The Portuguese Nun*.

“I think it is evident that a Barbarian [an American] couldn’t have made the films that I’ve made. And that’s a problem because my parents – I never know how to say this, because my mother is still alive but my father is dead. She’s very, very old so I’ll say ‘were’. They were very lovely people, but very modest. They were not very literate, but regarding cinema I do owe them something: when I was 13 years old, I had only ever seen ‘bougeants’ [a translation of ‘movies’ with the French verb ‘bouger’, meaning ‘to move’]. I had only seen Barbarian *bougeants*, and to me they’re not really cinema. I mean, as a child I enjoyed cartoons and such, but when I was 13, I don’t know why, my parents saw I had a certain curiosity and interest in cinema and they took me to see *La Dolce Vita*, a film that’s almost three hours long, in Italian, with subtitles. They liked it, which shows that at the time the audience was much larger for that type of film, that everyone was open. There weren’t categories in cinema: people just went to the cinema.

“But that was New York, so it was special. I had the misfortune of being born in Barbaria, but at least I was born in New York. There you could see all the European films. And

there I understood what a film really was, and it really struck me. Afterwards I started going to the cinema on my own, to watch European films. And so the films that impressed me the most after that were Ingmar Bergman’s *Wild Strawberries* – even today I think it is his best film – and Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Red Desert*. While I was watching *Red Desert* – I was 16 – I told myself that I wanted to be a filmmaker. So in some way, my parents have introduced me to things that I then experienced by myself. But I can say that it was thanks to my parents that I saw my first real film.

“My parents didn’t understand my work until recently... Well, they never tried to discourage me. But to them it wasn’t a real job. They believed that one needed a job to pay the bills. Especially for modest people, a large part of their energy was spent working to make a living. But it’s only when my films started being shown in Barbaria, and since critics from the *New York Times* [pronounced in French by Green as ‘Les Temps de la Nouvelle York’], the biggest Barbarian journal, that my mother started to realise that I hadn’t spent my life doing nothing.” **EL**



ALICE LOWE

*Alice Lowe first came to prominence as one of the co-stars of cult TV sitcom **Garth Marenghi's Darkplace**, and then as the writer and star of Ben Wheatley's 2012 film, **Sightseers**. **Prevenge**, in which she plays a pregnant woman driven to murder, is her directorial debut.*

“My mum and dad brought me up watching quite weird films and dramas, I think! Playwrights like Dennis Potter, who used to write for television, and Mike Leigh, and David Lynch. So I definitely had a sort of eccentric leaning towards unusual material. But, hilariously, my mum is really horrified that I keep putting violence in my films. She's really like, 'Oh no...' She's worried that she won't enjoy it. She'll enjoy the funny bits, but the darker bits she finds a bit overwhelming. I don't know... I'm in this position where I had a really nice childhood, and it's just that I put a lot of my fears into the work that I do. When I write, it's more fantasy than just horror. I write a lot of surrealism into my comedy, lots of different genre elements, so the violence is all part of the surrealism to me. It's not necessarily representing reality, it's more representing a fantasy or wish-fulfilment that some people might have that can also give catharsis.

“My parents took me to the movies a lot when I was very little, and they still go to the cinema even though they're in their seventies now. They actually go to the cinema more often than I do. I think that they really influenced me in terms of actresses as well. Comedy actresses that I liked when I was growing up, people like Julie Walters and Alison Steadman were people who they kept tabs on. So I kind of grew up watching those people and thinking that I would like to do what they do. I mean, I didn't know I was gonna be an actress for a long, long time, actually, but it was more that I was inspired by those funny women.

“It's sort of weird how interested I am in polar opposites, like fantasy and realism, so I really like a realistic, naturalistic performance. I think I'm influenced by people like Mike Leigh

and his performance style, as well as the improvisation that he uses to get naturalism out of people. What I like is, if you create realism, then when you have a surreal or fantasy moment, it really shocks the audience because they've been lulled into the sense of watching reality. They're relaxed like they're in their own living room, almost, talking to one of their friends, and then something strange happens and it really shocks them. I really like the mixture of those two elements. I'd love to do something that's completely surreal and completely crazy as well. I do like stylised performances too. But I think, especially when you're working with a low budget, you have to think a bit laterally about how to make the elements work that you've got. I think naturalism is something that sometimes comes about with low budget. It can work really well.

My parents are watching it tomorrow night. I'm a bit nervous, because my mum's already said, 'Oh no, we don't have to sit all the way through it, do we?' That's what she said! She's really proud of me, and she loves that I'm an actress and a writer. It's more that she's nervous about violence. I think she'd rather I just wrote a nice rom-com, but that's never gonna happen. I'd probably write a nasty rom-com.

“I don't try to put violence in my films, it just ends up in them. I also feel like, when you go to the cinema, you're there to see something that you don't see in real life, and so you have to have what I call those 'spikes' of action. I think that, even if you have quite a lot of dialogue in a film, there needs to be a point where something happens. And it's either violence, or love. I feel quite strongly about that. I don't make films where it's all subtext. You have to feel like something's gonna happen. And it will.” **ML**

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100

Great COMEDY FILMS

CURATED IN

CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

- ☐ 1. **THE KID** (Charlie Chaplin, 1921)
- ☐ 2. **SAFETY LAST!** (Fred C Newmeyer, 1923)
- ☐ 3. **SHERLOCK JR** (Buster Keaton, 1924)
- ☐ 4. **SPEEDY** (Ted Wilde, 1928)
- ☐ 5. **LE MILLION** (René Clair, 1931)
- ☐ 6. **I WAS BORN, BUT** (Yasujirô Ozu, 1932)
- ☐ 7. **BOUDU SAVED FROM DROWNING** (Jean Renoir, 1932)
- ☐ 8. **IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT** (Frank Capra, 1934)
- ☐ 9. **A NIGHT AT THE OPERA** (Sam Wood, 1935)
- ☐ 10. **RUGGLES OF RED GAP** (Leo McCarey, 1935)
- ☐ 11. **MY MAN GODFREY** (Gregory La Cava, 1936)
- ☐ 12. **EASY LIVING** (Mitchell Leisen, 1937)
- ☐ 13. **WAY OUT WEST** (James W Horne, 1937)
- ☐ 14. **THE SHOP AROUND THE CORNER**
(Ernst Lubitsch, 1940)
- ☐ 15. **CHRISTMAS IN JULY** (Preston Sturges, 1940)
- ☐ 16. **THE PALM BEACH STORY** (Preston Sturges, 1942)
- ☐ 17. **TO BE OR NOT TO BE** (Ernst Lubitsch, 1942)
- ☐ 18. **THE PALEFACE** (Norman Z McLeod, 1948)
- ☐ 19. **ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET FRANKENSTEIN**
(Charles T Barton, 1948)
- ☐ 20. **KIND HEARTS AND CORONETS** (Robert Hamer, 1949)
- ☐ 21. **THE LAVENDER HILL MOB** (Charles Crichton, 1951)
- ☐ 22. **GENEVIEVE** (Henry Cornelius, 1953)
- ☐ 23. **CALAMITY JANE** (David Butler, 1953)
- ☐ 24. **ARTISTS AND MODELS** (Frank Tashlin, 1955)
- ☐ 25. **BIG DEAL ON MADONNA STREET**
(Mario Monicelli, 1958)
- ☐ 26. **MON ONCLE** (Jacques Tati, 1958)
- ☐ 27. **SOME LIKE IT HOT** (Billy Wilder, 1959)
- ☐ 28. **I'M ALL RIGHT JACK** (John Boulting, 1959)
- ☐ 29. **ZAZIE DANS LE MÉTRO** (Louis Malle, 1960)
- ☐ 30. **THE LADIES MAN** (Jerry Lewis, 1961)
- ☐ 31. **SEDUCED AND ABANDONED** (Pietro Germi, 1964)
- ☐ 32. **A HARD DAY'S NIGHT** (Richard Lester, 1964)
- ☐ 33. **DR STRANGELOVE OR: HOW I LEARNED TO
STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE BOMB**
(Stanley Kubrick, 1964)
- ☐ 34. **PIERROT LE FOU** (Jean-Luc Godard, 1965)
- ☐ 35. **PLAYTIME** (Jacques Tati, 1967)
- ☐ 36. **BEDAZZLED** (Stanley Donen, 1967)
- ☐ 37. **CARRY ON UP THE KHYBER** (Gerald Thomas, 1968)
- ☐ 38. **STOLEN KISSES** (François Truffaut, 1968)
- ☐ 39. **HAROLD AND MAUDE** (Hal Ashby, 1971)
- ☐ 40. **THE HEARTBREAK KID** (Elaine May, 1972)
- ☐ 41. **THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE
BOURGEOISIE** (Luis Buñuel, 1972)
- ☐ 42. **AMARCORD** (Federico Fellini, 1973)
- ☐ 43. **PAPER MOON** (Peter Bogdanovich, 1973)
- ☐ 44. **YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN** (Mel Brooks, 1974)
- ☐ 45. **DARK STAR** (John Carpenter, 1974)
- ☐ 46. **NASHVILLE** (Robert Altman, 1975)
- ☐ 47. **THE BAD NEWS BEARS** (Michael Ritchie, 1976)
- ☐ 48. **SILVER STREAK** (Arthur Hiller, 1976)
- ☐ 49. **HOUSE** (Nobuhiko Ôbayashi, 1977)
- ☐ 50. **THE MUPPET MOVIE** (James Frawley, 1979)

CHEAT Sheet

- ☐ 51. THE JERK (Carl Reiner, 1979)
- ☐ 52. LIFE OF BRIAN (Terry Jones, 1979)
- ☐ 53. AIRPLANE! (David and Jerry Zucker, 1980)
- ☐ 54. THE GODS MUST BE CRAZY (Jamie Uys, 1980)
- ☐ 55. MODERN ROMANCE (Albert Brooks, 1981)
- ☐ 56. TOOTSIE (Sydney Pollack, 1982)
- ☐ 57. LOCAL HERO (Bill Forsyth, 1983)
- ☐ 58. TRADING PLACES (John Landis, 1983)
- ☐ 59. GHOSTBUSTERS (Ivan Reitman, 1984)
- ☐ 60. THIS IS SPINAL TAP (Rob Reiner, 1984)
- ☐ 61. BROADWAY DANNY ROSE (Woody Allen, 1984)
- ☐ 62. POLICE STORY (Jonathan Demme, 1993)
- ☐ 63. TAMPOPO (ûzô Itami, 1985)
- ☐ 64. EVIL DEAD II (Sam Raimi, 1987)
- ☐ 65. PLANES, TRAINS AND AUTOMOBILES (John Hughes, 1987)
- ☐ 66. DRAGNET (Tom Mankiewicz, 1987)
- ☐ 67. WITHNAIL & I (Bruce Robinson, 1987)
- ☐ 68. BEETLEJUICE (Tim Burton, 1988)
- ☐ 69. WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT (Robert Zemeckis, 1988)
- ☐ 70. WOMEN ON THE VERGE OF A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN (Pedro Almodóvar, 1988)
- ☐ 71. WHEN HARRY MET SALLY... (Rob Reiner, 1989)
- ☐ 72. MATINEE (Joe Dante, 1993)
- ☐ 73. DEAR DIARY (Nanni Moretti, 1993)
- ☐ 74. CLERKS (Kevin Smith, 1994)
- ☐ 75. TAKE CARE OF YOUR SCARF, TATIANA (Aki Kaurismäki, 1994)
- ☐ 76. MURIEL'S WEDDING (P.J Hogan, 1994)
- ☐ 77. DUMB AND DUMBER (Peter Farrelly, 1994)
- ☐ 78. BILLY MADISON (Tamra Davis, 1995)
- ☐ 79. AUSTIN POWERS: INTERNATIONAL MAN OF MYSTERY (Jay Roach, 1997)
- ☐ 80. RUSHMORE (Wes Anderson, 1998)
- ☐ 81. THE BIG LEBOWSKI (Ethan and Joel Coen, 1998)
- ☐ 82. ELECTION (Alexander Payne, 1999)
- ☐ 83. SOUTH PARK: BIGGER, LONGER & UNCUT (Trey Parker, 1999)
- ☐ 84. BEING JOHN MALKOVICH (Spike Jonze, 1999)
- ☐ 85. Y TU MAMÁ TAMBIÉN (Alfonso Cuarón, 2001)
- ☐ 86. PUNCH-DRUNK LOVE (Paul Thomas Anderson, 2002)
- ☐ 87. KITCHEN STORIES (Bent Hamer, 2003)
- ☐ 88. SCHOOL OF ROCK (Richard Linklater, 2003)
- ☐ 89. SHAUN OF THE DEAD (Edgar Wright, 2004)
- ☐ 90. TEAM AMERICA: WORLD POLICE (Trey Parker, 2004)
- ☐ 91. THE BOSS OF IT ALL (Lars von Trier, 2006)
- ☐ 92. I'M A CYBORG BUT THAT'S OK (Chan-wook Park, 2006)
- ☐ 93. STEP BROTHERS (Adam McKay, 2008)
- ☐ 94. IN BRUGES (Martin McDonagh, 2008)
- ☐ 95. LOVE EXPOSURE (Sono Sion, 2008)
- ☐ 96. POTICHE (François Ozon, 2010)
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Elle

Directed by

PAUL VERHOEVEN

Starring

ISABELLE HUPPERT

LAURENT LAFITTE

ANNE CONSIGNY

Released

10 MARCH

4

ANTICIPATION.

Paul Verhoeven, provocateur extraordinaire, makes his big return.

4

ENJOYMENT.

It's a Verhoeven movie, Jim, but not as we know it.

5

IN RETROSPECT.

Teases the viewer with its every double-edged frame.

That a new Paul Verhoeven film is accompanied by an almost ambient level of scandal should be no surprise: if ever a director has sought to provoke and mock that go-to critical chestnut 'problematic', it is he. From the outset *Elle* does not hold back. The film's protagonist, Michèle Leblanc (Isabelle Huppert), is viciously sexually assaulted during a home invasion. It then follows the complications that develop in her relationship with her attacker upon discovering his identity. As the successful co-owner of a videogame company, sexual harassment is a part of everyday life for Michèle. Both personally and professionally, she is a woman used to living

in a state of perpetual gender warfare. Position the assault alongside her traumatic childhood as the daughter of a notorious serial killer who preyed on small children, and matters become even more complex.

The film is based on the 2012 novel 'Oh...' by Philippe Djian, an author who long ago demonstrated his flair for page-to-screen translation with his 1985 novel '37° 2 le Matin' adapted by Jean-Jacques Beineix one year later into the cult sex odyssey, *Betty Blue*. With 'Oh...' winning the highly regarded Prix Interallie award in 2012, its reputation combined with the united force of Eurocinema powerhouses Verhoeven and Huppert meant that *Elle* was a force to be reckoned with long before its heralded Cannes premiere.

For starters, Verhoeven is a consummate shit-stirrer. Through its unambiguously difficult gender politics, *Elle* is a loose companion piece to the director's 1992 film *Basic Instinct*. While both films are marked by ambivalent female protagonists who dare us to be offended by their social transgressions, they are also marked just as plainly by their nostalgic reimagining of cinema history. *Basic Instinct*, for instance, is a love letter to Dario Argento's queer-edged neo-*giallo*, *Tenebre*, from 1982, a film that consciously blurs fact and fiction within the work of its central crime writer protagonist.

Likewise, *Elle* is not shy about the influence of Verhoeven's oft-cited debt to Jean Renoir's 1939 classic, *The Rules of the Game*, and both movies fall under the 'comedy of manners' umbrella. In the case of *Elle*, scathing social critique takes the shape of a frequently bleak and often vicious satire. But even the costume of the assailant in *Elle* flags cinema traditions long past: as much recalling Mario Bava's *Danger: Diabolik* as it does Louis Feuillade's 1913 silent crime serial *Fantômas*, it tells us that it is simultaneously a pantomime, a cartoon and a melodrama.

While Huppert's presence has led some critics to label the film as little more than a pissweak Michael Haneke replica, this forgets too quickly that while she has made three films with

Verhoeven, *Elle* much more closely aligns with another Huppert collaborator: Claude Chabrol, with whom she made a total of seven films. While the unsettling violence and cold ambivalence of Huppert's performance here certainly recalls her work with Haneke (one scene in particular is an obvious homage), it is arguably just as much indebted to Chabrol's love of seedy melodrama and his signature affection for the moral spectacle of social transgression.

Leaving all this aside, this collaboration between Huppert and Verhoeven echoes on some level similar thematic features that directors Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh Thi explored in their notorious 2000 film *Baise-Moi*, itself an adaptation of Despentes 1999 novel of the same name. It is flatly erroneous to consider *Elle* a rape-revenge film by any stretch of the definition. To claim that a desire for vengeance fundamentally propels the narrative is at best disingenuous, at worst wrongheaded. Yet the *Baise-Moi* comparison is still crucial. What is often overlooked about that film is that the killing spree undertaken by Manu (Raffaella Anderson) and Nadine (Karen Bach) is triggered not by the desire to avenge the graphic rape we see at the beginning of the film, but rather by Manu's nasty encounter with her brother afterwards, when he viciously accuses her of not responding to sexual assault "correctly".

For the women of *Baise-Moi*, as for Michèle, it is not just a question of responding to violence in ways deemed socially 'appropriate', but rather about finding a way to live with ongoing trauma any way they can, regardless of whether it makes sense to other characters (and the audience). These are women who want to survive, and these are films about making do, keeping it together when you have been emotionally re-wired on a fundamental level by a violent physical trauma. Verhoeven is undeniably a provocateur. But *Elle* is no hollow missile: to dismiss it as such actively shuts down the subversive potential for radical transgression that keeps Michèle alive, surviving, and connecting with those she loves.

ALEXANDRA HELLER-NICOLAS





Paul Verhoeven

The outspoken Dutch filmmaker discusses his triumphant return to cinema, *Elle*.

It's been 10 long years since Paul Verhoeven last graced cinema screens with *Black Book*. That film marked a return to his native Netherlands after a run of six US productions. Those films – beginning with *Robocop* in 1987 and culminating in *Hollow Man* 13 years later – staked his place as the foremost satirist of American culture in commercial cinema, each film smuggling a dirty bomb of subversion into the multiplex. After the wild success of *Basic Instinct* in 1992, Verhoeven's next film, *Showgirls* was greeted with outright hostility. Now he's back with his most slippery prospect to date, a French-language production featuring a career-best performance by Isabelle Huppert. We sat down with the filmmaker to chat *Elle*, controversy, satire and the good 'ol US of A.

LWLies: *Elle* is adapted from a novel by Philippe Djian, but the screenwriter is David Birke, who's best known for his serial killer movies, *Gacy* and *Dahmer*. Verhoeven: I didn't know that. I met him with regards to another project that I'm still trying to make with the former head of production at Fox, a film noir. I worked with him from the last draft, finalising the script, and although we never made that movie, I thought he was very talented. I didn't know about his former career, I based everything on the work we did on this thriller, called *Rogue*. When I thought about turning *Elle* into an American movie, I immediately thought of him.

Did the screenplay go through many changes once you got your hands on it? Not really. I mean, you always make small changes and refine things, if a scene is a bit too long or too short, but the first draft was 90 per cent of what the film is now.

Huppert's Michèle is a video game designer... Well, David Birke knows everything about video games! In the book, she's the head of a company that produces scripts for television and film. I thought it wasn't very visual to talk about screenplays on film, it'd be boring, just talk, talk, talk. The idea came from my daughter while we were having dinner, she said I should make her the head of a video game company. I didn't know anything about video games at all, but David did. Video games work as a perfect metaphor for complicity in screen violence, you even have Michèle say about the game she's developing, 'When the player guts an Orc, he has to feel the blood on his hands.' I don't think I thought that much about it. I didn't know anything about video games, my other daughter's husband

had to explain them to me. I just put the idea to David, and he said, 'Great'. He knows the language. I didn't think – perhaps he did – about complicity in violence, I just thought, 'That's visual'.

The film also takes some hilarious swipes at social niceties and middle class pretensions. A lot of that comes from David.

But with your American films seen as satires of American society, did you intend *Elle* as a skewering of the French middle class? Nope. I mean, it turned out that way. The ironies in certain scenes came on the set, I think. I'd be lying if I said I foresaw that, or that I was really trying to do that. Perhaps I did, but that came from the book. Neither did I think when I was doing *Starship Troopers* that I was trying to express something very specific about American society. When we were working on that film, we were laughing all the time because of elements we picked from reality and made much bigger in the movie. It's only in retrospect that I see we were fighting against the book by Robert Heinlein, which is pretty militaristic and proto-fascist. I disagreed with that, so we were trying to counter that in the irony of how these people are, what the news is and how the news is presented. It all happened in a very organic way, we didn't sit down and say we're going to make an ironic version of this book. We didn't even talk about irony, we just invented scenes and found ourselves laughing all the time.

Didn't you take specific shots from *Triumph of the Will*? That must have been meant ironically, no? It was our way of countering Robert Heinlein by going further than him. These people are Nazis, so we gave them Nazi costumes and took shots from Leni Riefenstahl's movies. We were saying, 'These are our heroes, but they're living in a fascist utopia.' What comes out of making a movie can have more depth in retrospect than you really thought while you were doing it. There are, of course, elements in your brain that do these things while you're not aware of it. You can read all these things into it afterwards, but it's good that you're not thinking about them while you're doing it, otherwise you're going to preach. Intrinsically it's a commentary on American society, where everyone has a gun, but while we were making it, we weren't thinking of it as a critical study of the United States, we were just laughing at our ideas.



“At the time, there were reviews of the film that said they didn’t even watch the second half of the movie because they had to go to the toilet to throw up.”

Do you think Trump’s America has moved beyond satire, or is it more necessary than ever? We don’t know if it’s Trump’s America. We hope it’s not. You couldn’t get a green-light on that movie today, certainly the way we made it. If you took all that stuff out, like they did with the remakes of *RoboCop* and *Total Recall*, you’d be taking out all the ambiguity, satire and irony. Straight, that’s what they want now. They think audiences are so stupid that they can’t handle another layer.

There were expectations of a lot of controversy over *Elle* after it played at Cannes, but that doesn’t seem to have materialised. Everybody was warning me that it was going to be very controversial, but I’ve not noticed anything. Perhaps it’ll happen in the US, but there was no problem in Toronto or Cannes.

There was a much greater outcry over the rape scenes in *Basic Instinct* and *Hollow Man*. Do you think that’s a question of context or the way you shot the scenes? It could well be that this is more artistic. If you want to use that word. If we’d made this movie in the United States, it would have been very controversial. It would have been flatter, more direct, more banal. Here we get to add more layers, and an actress like Isabelle Huppert who really believes in the part. There’s a difference between artistic and just well-made. I mean, I think *Starship Troopers* is artistic too. There’s no way we would have reached this level of authenticity or ‘art’ if we’d made *Elle* in the US.

When you were speaking in Cannes of the American actresses who wouldn’t take the part, you said they wouldn’t go near such an amoral script. But *Elle* isn’t really amoral, it’s not presented in moral terms. I would express it more precisely in that they were offended by the third act. It’s really her going to start an affair with her rapist, going into a sadomasochistic relationship. That was unacceptable to American actresses who only wanted to see a third act about revenge. In the American version, the first two acts would have been the same, you wouldn’t have lost much there, but the moment she discovers who the rapist is, American cinema and philosophy dictates it would have to be a revenge movie. The film goes in a completely different direction, it’s really, ‘love your enemy.’

The tide is slowly turning on appraisals of one of our favourite films of yours. Why do you think it’s taken so long for people to realise that *Showgirls* is a fucking masterpiece? I dunno, too many tits? To talk in the language of that movie, it’s tits and ass all the time. I think it was too much for everybody. It’s a very negative, cynical movie. Sex is money and money is sex. It was a completely negative statement. On top of that, you could see it as an attack, not just on Vegas, but on the US in general. Everything is about money. So it created an unpleasant feeling, and the abundance of nudity made people feel very uncomfortable. I remember when I was working on the Jesus seminar, half a year after *Showgirls* came out, two of the professors came to me and whispered, ‘We loved *Showgirls*!’ That was how people told me they liked it. It wasn’t like that with *RoboCop*, but that was less perverted.

Perhaps Jesus seminarians are the people that most need a little *Showgirls* in their life. That may well be true. They were really looking around to make sure nobody heard them. At the time, there were reviews of the film that said they didn’t even watch the second half of the movie because they had to go to the toilet to throw up. Normal reviews were like that. The New York Times wrote, ‘This man will never understand the United States.’ Which you could say was xenophobic, perhaps. Or maybe I understand the United States better than they do 🤔



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Silence

Directed by
MARTIN SCORSESE
Starring
ANDREW GARFIELD
ADAM DRIVER
LIAM NEESON
Released
1 JANUARY

5

ANTICIPATION.-

Scorsese's dream project, so this time it's personal – a late masterpiece?

4

ENJOYMENT.

A 159-minute slow burn which will probably resonate more deeply with the Catholic faithful.

4

IN RETROSPECT.

That a film this daringly austere exists in the marketplace is almost miraculous in itself.

A 1966 novel by Japanese Catholic writer Shusako Endo has obsessed Martin Scorsese for so long that *Silence* ends a three-decade slog to bring it to the screen. Scorsese's reputation has long been assured, and while the past decade has brought the likes of *The Aviator*, *The Departed* and *The Wolf of Wall Street* winning new audiences and sustaining his commercial viability, none of them have seemed wrenched from his soul in the way that, say, *Taxi Driver* or *Raging Bull* so evidently were. Might this 159-minute historical saga about a Portuguese missionary in 17th-century Japan be the late masterpiece to at last reveal the true Marty?

Well, you certainly get the sense that's precisely what he's set out to do. It's essentially a story about a super-keen young priest named Rodrigues (Andrew Garfield, positively quivering with sincerity), whose faith is tested when searching for his old mentor (a suitably careworn Liam Neeson), the latter believed to have renounced his religion under torture after the previously welcoming Japanese authorities have decided to cauterise all traces of Christianity from their country. Rodrigues' very presence, however, will expose the underground local faithful to fiendish punishment, sending him into a vortex of doubt as native innocents die horribly for their beliefs. The title then, refers to the silence of God in the face of human suffering – a heavy-duty theme met with heavy-duty celluloid treatment. Brows are furrowed, the pace is painstaking, the direction highly reserved by Scorsese standards.

Who knows when anything this austere last hit the multiplexes, since we're in the classic arthouse territory of Robert Bresson and Carl Dreyer, working a low-key naturalism imbued with a would-be spiritual aura. The expansive running time is a slow build, but its sheer depth of feeling brings a gradually enfolding embrace, pressuring us to confront fundamental questions about the nature and value of religious belief. Of all people, it's Shinya Tsukamoto (erstwhile director of out-there horror fare like *Tetsuo*), whose heartbreaking performance as a humble peasant aflame with Christian fortitude hits home early, prelude to an extended theological battle of wills between Issey Ogata's wily magistrate and Garfield's Jesuit cleric, whose yearning for the glory of martyrdom is looking increasingly shaky.

It's cumulatively involving, but not everyone will side with Scorsese's take on apostasy (publicly renouncing Christianity) as a soul-deep betrayal, since keeping the faith is only unleashing misery on the believers. Moreover, while the low-key visualisation carries a certain monolithic weight, there's a slight lack of poetry to give the film its own spiritual lift-off. Unlike Endo's vivid novel, here we're basically held exterior to Garfield's inner ferment, leaving a good actor striving against near-impossible circumstances. For all that, Scorsese's sheer seriousness of address is itself an act of faith in cinema's ability to confront the most esoteric of issues, though strangely the film's most affecting moment comes with the end credits, scored to the sound collage of a storm breaking at sea, which at last epitomises the buffeted serenity this very personal odyssey has been seeking all along. **TREVOR JOHNSTON**



LoveTrue

Directed by
ALMA HAR'EL
Released
10 FEBRUARY

4

ANTICIPATION.

An effervescent essay looking at love through a kaleidoscope.

3

ENJOYMENT.

High on its own supply of blurred (non)fiction lines.

3

IN RETROSPECT.

Better suited to Vimeo Staff Picks than brick + mortar cinemas.

“ I wish we could make a movie only about good things,” laments Will Hunt (code name: Coconut Willie). A lovelorn surfer and single father, he’s one of three characters – it’s fair to call them that – in this hybrid documentary by *Bombay Beach* director Alma Har’el. Traversing the notion of love in all its colours, shades and shapes, *LoveTrue* is less of an essay film and more like a painted poem. With its opening riff on a passage from Corinthians lilting over wistful imagery, it’s clear from right out of the gate that this is an exercise in style as much as substance.

Willie is your basic young man, living the simple Hawaiian life of a coconut water vendor, doing his darndest to raise his baby right. In Alaska, Warhammer fan Blake was “born a nerd,” but now must balance a relationship with her boyfriend and her job as an exotic dancer. Victory lives in New York with her large family, save her mum who has seemingly deserted the prodigious singer, along with her siblings and their father. Despite the disparate locations, each of Har’el’s subjects has been touched by the universal experiences of love, faith and hope. The documentary grapples with love’s many guises: romantic, parental, religious, vocational. It also depicts the heart’s darker repercussions, such as Willie’s latent inclination toward violence, Blake’s tight grip on childhood trauma, and Victory’s blindness to her father’s abusive tendencies. Curiously, platonic love is not examined. Though Will, Blake and Victory are all young adults, they appear to be loners, lacking in close social ties.

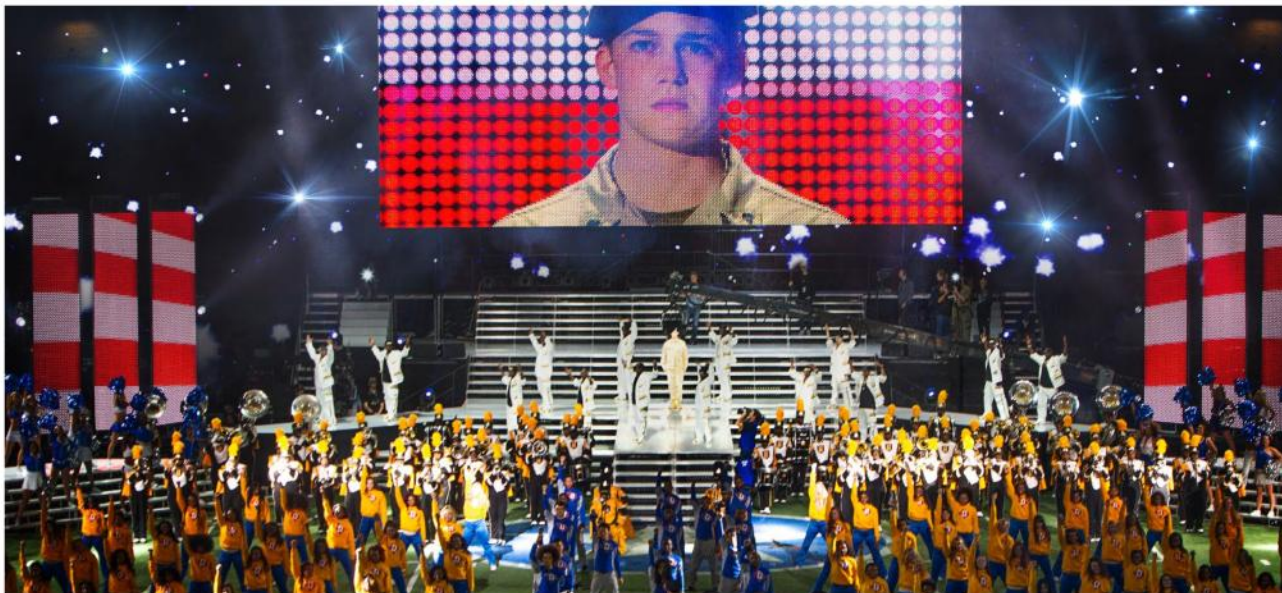
Rather, their family relationships are a focal point for Har’el. Love’s evil stepsisters Hate, Fear

and Depression manifest in the film via divorce, bullying, loneliness, and the enduring consequences of separating children from their parents. Intimate observational and interview sequences reveal the characters’ passions, while dreamlike (sometimes nightmarish) dramatisations bring deep-seated anxieties to life.

This film is aesthetically stunning, as per Har’el’s reputation (she’s been lauded by MTV, Sheffield Doc/Fest, The Independent Spirit Awards and others). But eventually the recreations become brazen and lose gravitas. Using subtitles in place of conventional voiceover is novel but obfuscating, and makes it even harder to sympathise with characters that aren’t entirely likeable. Y’know, like people in the real world, such as *LoveTrue*’s executive producer Shia LaBeouf.

As director, producer, cinematographer and editor, Har’el has a singular vision. Fascinated by performance, she casts actors and family members in fantastical scenes. Victory’s father improvises with actress Chineze Enekwechi, who plays his estranged wife and eventually visits her ‘real life’ counterpart. Merging fact, fiction and imagined narratives may be *en vogue* (see also: *Taxi Tehran*, *Kate Plays Christine*) but here it feels forced and affected. Smoke-and-mirror trickery does not compensate for dull subjects with un compelling arcs.

Is it imperative for screen characters to always be amiable? Not at all. But in a film about love, it sure wouldn’t hurt. “I’m not unique. I’m a human being,” confesses Will Hunt. Like Blake and Victory, he needs to learn to love himself before he can be loved by others unconditionally. **AIMEE KNIGHT**



Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk

Directed by

ANG LEE

Starring

JOE ALWYN

GARRETT HEDLUND

ARTURO CASTRO

Released

10 FEBRUARY

4

ANTICIPATION.

Ang Lee returns with some heavy artillery.

3

ENJOYMENT.

A unique, hyper-real whatsit that should be seen the way it was shot.

3

IN RETROSPECT.

Interesting, but not a film for which Lee will be remembered.

The most arresting moment in Ang Lee's Hollywood filmography is the shot of Heath Ledger silhouetted against 4 July fireworks in *Brokeback Mountain*, a complex tableau of patriotism and masculinity shot from a reverent low-angle perspective. That prodigious image finds an extended rhyme in *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*, as the eponymous infantryman (Joe Alwyn) stands stock-still on stage at a Dallas football stadium amid a riot of carefully stage-managed red, white and blue pyrotechnics. They are meant as a 'Mission Accomplished' tribute, but serve only to make native terrain feel more alienating to a homecoming soldier.

The broad satire and critique of American spectacle and exceptionalism is derived from Ben Fountain's 2012 source novel, while the visual aplomb belongs to Lee. As with his film versions of source texts as varied as 'Sense and Sensibility', 'Hulk' and 'Life of Pi', the director has done his best to locate a cinematic language that serves the material. The by-now infamous decision to shoot the production on digital video at a turbo-charged frame rate must be addressed right off the bat, because it transforms what might otherwise have seemed like a standard-issue prestige picture into a genuine oddity: as the opening credits unfold over images of Silver-Star-winner Lynn and his fellow Bravo company soldiers being herded into a stretch hummer en route to their arena-sized tribute, some viewers may feel like they're watching a soap opera on their parents' out-of-the-box and as-yet uncalibrated flat screen television set.

Lee has always been interested in the tension between traditionalism and modernity, and while some will surely judge him a casualty of his own technocratic

aestheticism, the sheer strangeness of seeing local and foreign environments in super-high-def 3D clarity counts as a stylistic coup. It's also apropos thematically insofar as Fountain's novel is about its protagonist's disorientation, which keeps flinging him mentally back to Iraq even as he's being celebrated along with his comrades. Alwyn's fine performance captures the crippling indecision of a man who jokes to his sister (Kristen Stewart) that he's expecting to die a virgin even as his (and our) senses are inflamed by the carnivalesque surroundings. Lee shows how Billy is caught between several different kinds of love and loyalty, and finds room for his own empathetic queer sensibility, as when a producer, played by Chris Tucker, suggests that the movie version of Bravo company's exploits could star Hillary Swank in a *Boys Don't Cry*-style turn.

If the film's self-reflexive comedy is its weakest aspect, it's also fascinating to note that an Iraq War movie featuring a subplot citing the reluctance of American audiences to see movies about the Iraq war has itself been a commercial non-starter. Yet Lee's ambitions are admirable. He peers through new technological prisms, interrogates the deforming effects of showbiz on reality, and explores universal concepts of empathy and sacrifice without kowtowing to sentimentality. When Billy tearfully salutes the flag during the national anthem, Lee conjures up an inner vision of safety, pride and fulfilment that involves fucking a cheerleader in his parents' bedroom, and then holds on his protagonist's face long enough for us to realise that not only is it not (simply) a joke, but also that the gap between teenage daydreams and the governing cultural myths that people live and die for is not very wide at all. **ADAM NAYMAN**



Lion

Directed by

GARTH DAVIS

Starring

SUNNY PAWAR

DEV PATEL

NICOLE KIDMAN

Released

20 JANUARY

3

ANTICIPATION.

Since its festival debut, Lion has been talked up as an awards contender.

3

ENJOYMENT.

An impressive first half, a depressive second.

2

IN RETROSPECT.

Robustly made, but very little to gnaw on.

You don't find out why this film is called *Lion* until right at the very end. But, during the two hours you're left guessing, you might hazard that it was referring to some kind of Google Chrome extension. Everyone's favourite billion dollar search engine assumes one of the lead roles in this tearjerking true tale of a displaced Indian street urchin whose late night Google Earth jags help him to reconnect with his roots.

A series of unfortunate events leads knee-high cutiepie Saroo Brierley (Sunny Pawar) to be forcibly parted from his dirt poor family and their dingy hut in rural India. Waiting on a desolate station platform for his older brother to return from a work hook-up, he dozes off inside a train compartment which then whisks him 1,600 kilometres across country. Penniless, unable to speak the local dialect, and with no way to identify his mother beyond "mum", he also cannot remember the name of his village. Initially kicked to the curb before being swept up into the orphanage system, a new life path beckons.

It's evident early on that director Garth Davis knows how to knock a film together. He gets the best of his exotic locations without ever succumbing to picture-postcard landscape porn. Very few shots are comprised of empty colour, and the ones that do are subtly loaded with narrative portent. He also does well to represent the extreme poverty of the locale without ever allowing his camera to gravitate towards decontextualised suffering. There's a snappy dynamism to the editing, emulating the rushing pace of Saroo's life, especially when in the loving

company of his brother Guddu (Abhishek Bharate). Yet this is a more sensitive, less impressionistic approach to cultural depiction than, say, Danny Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire*.

At the midway point, the narrative takes a giant 20 year leap into the future and the film fritters to pieces. No-nonsense storytelling is usurped by the queasy spectacle of hugging, crying and bizarre facial nuzzling. The film reveals its true nature as a covert piece of political advocacy on the joys of adoption, as Saroo (now played by Dev Patel) adjusts to a new life in a(nother) far off land – Tasmania. This second half also fills out the cast with big name actors, including Nicole Kidman, David Wenham and Rooney Mara. It's perhaps their presence which saps the story of its vitality, replacing it with mannered emoting and tremble-toned speechifying.

Where Davis tempts us in with his snappy and appealing visual fluency, he then repels us with decorous blue-grey melodrama. And despite the fact that through a host of climactic inter-titles it is revealed that the film is working in tandem with children's charities, there's no actual moral or message to ponder. Unless it's some unlikely parable about remembering where you came from. Or maybe a cautionary tale about the kindness of strangers, especially those in the West with lots of disposable income. Or maybe it's just a film that says, if you're ever down in the dumps and freighted with high anxiety, fire up your internet router, spend a night on the sofa randomly rolling your cursor over Google Earth. Soon, all your prayers will be answered.

DAVID JENKINS



Moonlight

Directed by

BARRY JENKINS

Starring

TREVANTE RHODES

ALEX HIBBERT

MAHERSHALA ALI

Released

24 FEBRUARY

3

ANTICIPATION.

One little-seen feature to his name – Jenkins has a lot to prove.

5

ENJOYMENT.

A disarming and tender triptych, fluent in the language of wordless emotion.

5

IN RETROSPECT.

A lost lover worth carrying a torch for.

Unspoken, unspeakable intimacy is the dominant mode of Barry Jenkins' *Moonlight*, a personal/political triptych which offers keen perspectives on masculinity, queer sexuality, racial identity, and the odd angles at which they intersect. In adapting the story of a closed-off boy trembling before love (first unrecognisable, then unrequited) from the play 'In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue', Jenkins presents his treatise on the many trials of black life in America. At once an aching romance worthy of comparison to Wong Kar-wai's best and a vital glimpse into a cultural milieu historically underserved by the cinema, *Moonlight* pries open the viewer's eyes as it curb-stomps their heart. That, and it features the single most poignant hand job in the history of the artform.

In a climate as socially rigid as urbanised Miami, which Jenkins realises with care and exhaustive attention to detail, to deviate from the norm is to invite harassment. A gay kid is a difficult thing to be in an aggressively straight neighbourhood such as this, a lesson young Chiron learns the hard way, again and again. Throughout his boyhood, adolescence and young adulthood – respectively portrayed by Alex Hibbert, Ashton Sanders and Trevante Rhodes, three actors seemingly working from a single mind – he figures out how to make his way through a world that doesn't know what to do with him by keeping his mouth shut.

Silence protects him as a boy, already ostracised due to his diminutive stature. Staying quiet mostly keeps him out of harm's way, whether from schoolyard teasing or more troubling aggressions

from his mother (Naomie Harris), who's taken a liking to crack cocaine. In his sullen teen years, his tacit stare is a multi-purpose response to the bullies tormenting him, fear and despair and steely resolve all in one. By the time we rejoin him as an adult, his long pauses in conversation conceal a novel's worth of suppressed feeling.

An assortment of men, both in platonic and romantic capacities, shape his life. A neighbourhood dealer, played by Mahershala Ali as a model of paternal warmth, provides a father figure for Chiron even as he destroys the boy's mother. A high-school enemy hardens him with constant beatings and drives the goodhearted student to shocking extremes. A lifelong crush takes Chiron from the earliest tentative experimentation through to his miraculous first sexual experience. Each of them challenge Chiron's constantly shifting notion of what manhood is or should be, pushing him to toughen up or hold fast to his softer nature.

With an authorial generosity so rare it borders on radical, Jenkins affords infinite empathy to all his creations. He imbues the stock figures native to fiction about poverty – the addict, the slinger, the innocent caught in the middle – with finely shaded humanity, and carries that gentler approach to the shattering romance that commands the final act. The concluding sentiment of compassion speaks to the film's macro and micro-scaled ambitions: in their own humble and imperfect way, everyone's just trying to carve out a life for themselves.

CHARLES BRAMESCO



Barry Jenkins

The *Moonlight* director discusses the value of film school and finding a personal voice.

It was 2008's festival hit *Medicine For Melancholy* that put the name Barry Jenkins on the map of many perceptive cinephiles, but few could've predicted that he would make such a stellar return. *Moonlight* is his stunning, erotic triptych about a black Floridian man wrestling with his emotions across three generations, and is now one of the main 2017 award contenders.

LWLies: Do you have memories of going to the cinema with your mother? Jenkins: Not with my mother but I do remember always liking movies. Even when I discovered there was a film programme at Florida State, the thing that I thought was, 'Wow I've always really loved movies, I should check that out'. It's kind of cliché because my films aren't escapism. I don't remember seeing any kids films. I remember going to see *The Colour Purple*, *Aliens*, *Terminator 2*. Really big and loud Hollywood films.

Why do you think you've ended up not making those kinds of movies? When I first got into film

I realised it was a great vehicle to express myself. But when I started film school I was in a small class of about 30 kids but everybody's movies looked and sounded the same. And that's because we all grew up watching the same things. It's not like today when, if you have a hard drive, you can just shoot until you fill it up. We were very limited when it came to how much we were allowed to shoot. I didn't know anything, I didn't know you needed light to expose film. I also thought, I'm gonna watch the shit that nobody else is watching, and that was foreign cinema.

This idea of people going through that film school process together, you would expect to see different ideas and different types of storytelling. You know, it's weird. It wasn't a melting pot of personalities, but again, the US dominates the film industry. Cinema is a global economy, a global art form. But the things that have the marketing money to really push above the noise are these huge Hollywood studio productions, some of which are good but most of which are not. But they're not meant to be. I like to think your influences don't dictate your aesthetic, but in this case, our influences were dictating our aesthetic. It was when Wes Anderson was becoming popular, and there were so many Wes Anderson knock offs at film school. And I was like, 'I'm not gonna do this. I'll find something else.'

The world is connected like never before, and it feels like people are more interested in different cultures and forms of storytelling. There is a hunger for it and I think there's always been a hunger for

it. There used to be like four cinema chains and three premium cable channels and it was all very concentrated. Now it's so varied that there is literally more content sources than there is content to fill the space. I think what's happened is voices in the past may not have fit into those four or five finite spaces. Now, if you don't fit here you just go over there.

Is it your job to think about the audience? It is and it isn't. I want to be considerate of the audience but I don't want to make decisions that anticipate the reaction of an audience. The audience comes to the film to see what I feel, what the actors feel. I think the type of moviegoers I make films for don't go to the movies expecting me to make things that they want. We're putting out energy and the audience is responding to it. It shouldn't go in reverse. We work in a very privileged artform. This shit is expensive. So if you're not considering the audience in some way, if you antagonise the audience to a degree that is simply too far for them to get a foothold in the work, nobody's going to come and see your film. Nobody's going to recommend your film to anyone else and you're not going to get to make more films. Now is that fair to think of that when you're creating a work of art? No. But making something that costs hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars, we can't just burn that money. You have to make concessions so that people will be willing to watch and be interested in that piece. And to further that people will be motivated, incentivised and interested to pay to watch the piece because these things cost money to make 🍷



Miss Sloane

Directed by

JOHN MADDEN

Starring

JESSICA CHASTAIN

GUGU MBATHA-RAW

JOHN LITHGOW

Released

24 FEBRUARY

4

ANTICIPATION.

An under-the-radar awards contender?

2

ENJOYMENT.

Jessica Chastain is as great as ever, but...

2

IN RETROSPECT.

...that ending, jeez.

“When I take the stand, you’ll see nothing but a granite wall,” says Jessica Chastain’s eponymous DC power player to her concerned lawyer, a few minutes into *Miss Sloane*. He’s schooling her in the necessary specifics of pleading the Fifth Amendment when she’s hauled in front of a special committee, set up to take her to task on ethical infringements in her role as a high-flying “conviction lobbyist.” As the rules of drama dictate, it’s not long before cracks begin to appear, fissures formed when personal assumptions threaten a manicured and ferociously guarded professional veneer.

To all intent and purpose, Elizabeth Sloane is a vampire; a porcelain insomniac subsisting on a steady diet of ego, amphetamines and the weakness of those foolish enough to fall into her circle of influence. She’s “the poster child for the most morally bankrupt profession since faith healing,” ever-ready to fire an arsenal of withering put-downs, to throw comrades-in-arms under a bus in service of an endgame. Pathologically averse to human relationships beyond the transactional, Sloane fights to keep said granite wall intact; personal questions dismissed with, “That’s all my principles of exchange will allow.” While it’s refreshing that the borderline sociopathy of a gender-neutral corporate warrior suffers little in the way of psychological mansplaining, third act revelations reveal a bluffing hand of catastrophic proportions.

As Sloane jumps ship from the firm that wants her to “start getting women into guns,” in favour

of an underdog outfit fighting for stricter buying regulations, *Miss Sloane* clearly wants us to think it’s about ethics in political lobbying. When personal alliances are formed and sacrificed, it wants us to think it’s about ethics in professional relationships. What it’s really about is Jon Perera’s screenplay.

It’s difficult to discuss the clanging stupidity of its denouement without giving too much away, suffice to say that the least of its problems are the cyborg cockroaches and the most hilariously potent intonation of the word ‘EARTHQUAKE’ since Charlton Heston found himself stuck in LA’s crack. The revelation of Perera’s ultimate priority – that everything has been in service to a long-con – undermines all that preceded. Sloane’s opacity becomes less a question of psychological subtlety than a mere tool in guarding Perera’s duff hand. Supporting characters fare little better. Gugu Mbatha-Raw, Jake Lacy and Mark Strong are little more than empty constructs positioned to serve as moral counterpoints to Chastain’s emotional vacuum.

That said, in its own trashy, House of Cards-y kind of way, the film is never less than engaging – even at its most preposterous. Chastain sinks her fangs into her meatiest role since *Zero Dark Thirty*, and John Madden keeps things moving, whipping off his Marigolds to skilfully negotiate 132 minutes of sub-Sorkin walk-n-talks. Yet with questions of political ethics getting a thorough airing of late, the film’s unwillingness to engage in any meaningful sense with the issues it purports to raise feels like an opportunity squandered. **MATT THRIFT**



Cameraperson

Directed by
KIRSTEN JOHNSON
Released
27 JANUARY

4

ANTICIPATION.

A crowdpleaser at Sundance and SXSW, and the Grand Jury prize winner at Sheffield Doc/Fest 2016.

4

ENJOYMENT.

A life lived; a craft mastered; a world observed.

4

IN RETROSPECT.

An essential film about how documentaries are made and watched.

There's a tendency to trivialise documentary craft. It's either impartial, fly-on-the-wall observation or the opposite, which is hard politically motivated manipulation. Traversing time and terrain, Kirsten Johnson's *Cameraperson* reveals the shades in between, where passive and active mix. We hear (off-camera) Johnson's joy at tailing a grinning Bosnian shepherd. Later, there's an awestruck gasp as a flash of lightning illuminates a landscape. We see Johnson film her mother, mosques and Michael Moore. The latter remains an icon of documentary subjectivity, and he is resoundingly undercut with the entirely fresh conceit of this film.

Unique in form and expansive in function, *Cameraperson* is an assemblage of footage shot over the 25-year career of cinematographer Johnson who has worked with the likes of Moore, Laura Poitras and Dawn Porter. A handful of projects provide the majority of the film's material, giving the free-flowing structure of scenes, shots and sequences a number of anchor points, including the grisly murder of James Byrd Jr (from 2002's *Two Towns of Jasper*), and an inquiry into the systematic rape of Bosnian women by Serbian forces (from 2011's *I Came to Testify*). In interviews, Johnson has presented *Cameraperson* as her interrogation into various ethical dilemmas that come with making documentaries: how to preserve dignity when capturing the traumatic experiences of others; who, or what, these films serve; and how to represent the horrors of history. For whatever the style or intent of the source footage, it is repurposed and reframed, removing the natural hierarchy that separates the filmmaker and the subject, as well as the sociopolitical surroundings that can turn

people into case studies.

Yet the generic title highlights not just the role of the cameraperson, but the profession itself, and the film is a rare invitation into the harrowing, exhilarating life of the jobbing cinematographer. Projects overlap in chronology and memory, as Johnson and editor Nels Bangerter cut back and forth between home and abroad, corralling the personal and the work-for-hire. Some of the film's most affecting sequences are rich with such meaning: shots of a Bosnian toddler precariously playing with an axe develop into a mini treatise on intervention in documentary filmmaking, and take on extra significance when paired with domestic footage of Johnson's young children back in New York. The credits thank not only Johnson's parents, but the women who cared for her kids while their mother was halfway across the world, plying her trade.

Johnson's earnest worldview is reflected in her sensitivity towards those she films, most of whom happen to be women, and formidable women at that: from Darfurian refugees balancing axes on their heads, taking breaks from chopping trees to casually call out the men who oppress them, to a cucumber-cool Nigerian midwife, performing near-miracles in a tragically under-equipped maternity ward. A brief introductory note from the director opens the film: "I originally shot the following footage for other films, but here I ask you to see it as my memoir. These are the images that have marked me and leave me wondering still." The footage Johnson has excavated undoubtedly leaves a mark, but *Cameraperson* leaves a far stronger impression of the filmmaker herself – her cares, her concerns, and her craft. **MICHAEL LEADER**



Fences

Directed by

DENZEL WASHINGTON

Starring

DENZEL WASHINGTON

VIOLA DAVIS

MYKELTI WILLIAMSON

Released

17 FEBRUARY

4

ANTICIPATION.

Two powerhouse actors sparring in a Pulitzer Prize-winning play.

3

ENJOYMENT.

The richness and intensity doesn't make the jump from stage to screen.

3

IN RETROSPECT.

Washington is customarily magnetic, but this is Davis's film.

This is a filmed version of a 1983 play by August Wilson, with Denzel Washington in the lead role and the director's seat. From its detailed, verbose opening phrases, it's clear that this is an opportunity to watch great actors going through their expressive motions. Long takes, longer monologues, one central location, very little concession to considering how the tools of cinema might enhance this roistering, anguished text. In fact, it's the delicate flourishes that dent the illusion of reality which, in turn, brings the whole thing down.

As an (other) impassioned speech surges towards its inevitable crescendo, sentimental music rises in the sound mix, signposting emotions that do not need signposting. As Washington shimmies from the interior of a small house into the yard (where much of the key drama takes place), the camera pans down the steps offering a close-up on his feet. It's a small touch but it stands out – more as an attempt to make the presence of the camera felt, however briefly, than something that adds to the story. Yet when Washington simply points the camera at his actors, trains it on their faces, and watches them as they talk, he inevitably lands on moments of magic. This is most fascinating as a film about enunciation and interpretation. The grammar is as important (if not moreso) than the words – where to pause, where to hesitate, where to pull back and re-start a thought, where to get loud, where to go quiet, when to interrupt, when to pass the baton.

Fences is the story of a surly, charismatic down-and-out named Troy Maxon (Washington) – an ex-baseball player-turned-dustman in '50s suburban

Pittsburgh and king of his modest castle. On a Friday, he swaggers home with his buddy, Bono (Stephen Henderson), slams down his paycheck of \$76.42 on the dining table, and sips from a pint of gin – his unwinding ritual. His wife, Rose, is played by Viola Davis, and she is secretly the film's main character. She doesn't just tolerate Troy, she adores him and it's easy to see why. He's a fiendish raconteur, able to tangle an unsuspecting listener into his fanciful yarns in an instant. The character is a rambunctious gift that Washington duly accepts and unwraps, perhaps a little too overzealously. As a man he's a force of nature, as a character, there are no contrasts. He's an armchair activist, fully aware of racial inequality in America but unwilling to make things better for anyone other than himself.

It is Davis who makes this film sing. She is an actor who has made a habit of finding untapped depths in even the most minor, poorly written of characters (of which this is not one). Wilson's dialogue hands her the opportunity to get the emotional pistons firing. What makes her performance so effective is that the story monitors a change in temperament. Her anger is locked inside until her scallywag husband eventually rips it from her chest. Her transition from dutiful, ornamental bride to bruised avenger is invigorating to observe. Where Troy's heart is always visible in plain sight, Rose is the more quietly tragic figure. She suppresses her torment. It festers internally. It's a story about dignity and self-hatred, flawed men and abused women, a vision of a radiant, hopeful America and the depressing, complex, apocalyptic reality. **DAVID JENKINS**



Trespass Against Us

Directed by

ADAM SMITH

Starring

MICHAEL FASSBENDER

BRENDAN GLEESON

LYNDSEY MARSHAL

Released

3 MARCH

4

ANTICIPATION.

Two of Ireland's acting heavyweights go toe-to-toe.

3

ENJOYMENT.

They don't let us down. The film around them sometimes does.

3

IN RETROSPECT.

It's alright, mush.

“Nobody is going to tell me that I come from the ass of an ape, or your granddaddy was a fish.” So says Colby (Brendan Gleeson) in *Trespass Against Us*, and while you might take issue with this point of view, Colby is not a man you’d want to tangle with over matters as trivial as the origin of the species. Colby is the patriarch of the Cutler clan, a family of travellers that has made its home on a rubbish-strewn corner of Gloucestershire’s green fields. Clad in a black tracksuit and usually found slumped in an old armchair, surveying his surroundings with a suspicious glare, Colby is a quietly dominant presence, occasionally rousing himself to dispatch his offspring on lucrative ram-raiding heists across the county.

This is a plum role for Gleeson with the actor’s garrulous affability slipping easily into steely menace, never more so than in a police interview where he taunts the ‘gavvers’ with a meandering, nonsensical story about a goat. It’s easy to see how he maintains such control over his family, even his eldest and smartest son Chad (a touchingly vulnerable Michael Fassbender), whose desire for a more stable life for his wife and child is the narrative’s driving force. While it’s hard to initially get over the cognitive dissonance of seeing these two Irish actors being saddled with broad west country accents, the sturdy, charismatic performances that they deliver provide a crucial anchor for a movie that frequently threatens to veer off the road.

Trespass Against Us marks the feature debut for both screenwriter Alastair Siddons and director

Adam Smith, and their inexperience sometimes tells in the film’s rickety structure and jarring tonal shifts. Their grip on the characters’ motivation is murky at best and they rarely exhibit the confidence of filmmakers who have a clear sense of where their story is going, which is perhaps how they ended up with such a confoundingly misjudged ending. There’s also the presence of Sean Harris to contend with. The actor’s performance here, as a feral halfwit named Gordon Bennett who likes blowing things up, is more mannerisms than man, and he cuts a rather ridiculous figure in the otherwise realistically drawn milieu.

Fortunately that milieu is evocative enough to compensate for such distractions, and while *Trespass Against Us* may be a familiar crime family saga at heart, the very fact that it takes place within a community we’re not used to spending time with in cinema is enough to make it feel distinctive and fresh. The use of vernacular dialogue and the sense of intimacy that’s evident in the Cutlers’ home helps immerse us in their world, and it might even get some viewers on the family’s side in their running battle with the police (personified here by an exasperated Rory Kinnear). *Trespass Against Us* may be something of a confused curiosity, but whatever you say about the film’s various virtues and flaws, it’s certainly never boring, and it even boasts moments of unique brilliance. After all, when was the last time you saw a high-speed police chase interrupted by the protagonist’s burning desire to buy a packet of fags and some Maltesers?

PHIL CONCANNON



La La Land

Directed by
DAMIER CHAZELLE
Starring
RYAN GOSLING
EMMA STONE
AMIEE CONN
Released
13 JANUARY

3

ANTICIPATION.

Gosling and Stone are a strong draw, but the trailers all looked terribly twee.

4

ENJOYMENT.

You'll be reluctantly wooed and fall head over heels.

4

IN RETROSPECT.

Open-hearted gushy romanticism in CinemaScope. What's not to love?

Twenty-first century movie musicals tend to be met with audience skepticism. For every success story (*Pitch Perfect*), there has been an unmitigated disaster (*Nine*, *Rock of Ages*). As large, expensive, resource-heavy productions, they tend to be a risky proposition when it comes to the finance department. So when the word 'ambitious' is trotted out to describe the contemporary musical, it has cautionary overtones. In *La La Land*, writer/director Damien Chazelle not only fulfills that ambition, but tackles the idea of whether it's time to consign the genre to history. In so doing, he reinvigorates the unabashed song-and-dance styling of the classic MGM musical. In spite of its modern setting, the film is a proudly retrograde exercise in sugary escapism. Located in a dreamy alternative Los Angeles, its protagonists float through the Griffiths Observatory and scamper across old-timey studio soundstages. It's an imaginary, rose-tinted cityscape that'd make any hard-nosed Angeleno red in the face.

The film opens with a lavish musical set-piece featuring drivers dancing over car rooftops during a bumper-to-bumper traffic jam. With splashy primary colours and spontaneous bursts of song, it loudly announces to the world that it is one of *those* musicals. Meaning, any and all cynics can kindly make their way to the nearest exit. Retaining that starry-eyed romanticism front and centre, it introduces us to barista/aspiring actress Mia (Emma Stone, the perfect ingenue), who's sick of the constant disappointment of auditioning. She falls in love with Ryan Gosling's Sebastian, an

underemployed jazz pianist. It takes Gosling and Stone's combined star power – brought together in a sort of reverse meet cute – for *La La Land* to really find its feet. The film kicks into a full-bore charm offensive as our wayward protagonists tapdance through the wee afterparty hours, a peachy-lilac glow radiating from the city skyline.

While the stars make up for their lack of musical skill with fizzy chemistry, it's hard to say they'd cut it if an old-guard musical produder like Arthur Freed were in charge. The songs aren't bad so much as forgettable, with the notable exception of the forlorn jazz piano refrain which draws the pair together. There may not be a single 'big' toe-tapping number in the whole film. Still, Gosling goes full Brando in *Guys and Dolls* here, leaning on his not-inconsiderable charisma to make up for his lack of pipes.

Chazelle's Los Angeles is a refuge for all-or-nothing dreamers, where the ghosts of cinema loom large – from Gene Kelly to James Dean. You can count each reference until you run out of digits, leaving *La La Land* open to accusations of pastiche. But that discounts how open-heartedly the film professes its love for the genre, and how hard it works to prove that the movie musical still has mileage. It may be critiqued as an outlier – a latecomer to an art form which long ago had its heyday – but as the two leads tap dance through parking lots and old picture palaces, a lyric from jazz great Chet Baker comes to mind: 'I'm full of foolish song'. And with *La La Land's* glittering jewel tones and gushing romance, it's hard not to feel the same. **CHRISTINA NEULAND**



Manchester by the Sea

Directed by
KENNETH LONERGAN
Starring
CASEY AFFLECK
MICHELLE WILLIAMS
KYLE CHANDLER
Released
13 JANUARY

4

ANTICIPATION.

Come in, Manchester by the Sea, we've been expecting you.

5

ENJOYMENT.

Too much. Just too much.

4

IN RETROSPECT.

Kenneth Lonergan – builder and destroyer of worlds.

There is too much going on in *Manchester by the Sea* and still it is among the best films of this or any year. It is too funny, too tragic, and too full of nods to all manner of movie genres. It is an odd-couple buddy movie, a mystery unfolding via flashback, a family melodrama, a naturalistic comedy, an insurmountable tragedy and an elegy for people living with their internal flame extinguished. Miraculously, all these elements are bound together by the brilliantly humane writing of Kenneth Lonergan which is then paired with powerful performances by Lucas Hedges, Michelle Williams and Casey Affleck.

Affleck plays Lee, a stony-faced janitor living alone in the cell-like basement of a Boston apartment block. This set-up follows a contrasting title credit set-up in which Lee jokes merrily with a young boy on a boat while his older brother, Joe (Kyle Chandler), takes the helm. That was then. When, we don't know. In the present, Lee does the rounds of his building, making repairs and remaining impassive as tenants reveal their entertaining foibles. He is polite and softly-spoken until riled. Outbursts, either verbal or expressed through his fists, are a vital outlet. Affleck excels at playing men whose intensity is channelled in uncomfortable ways climaxing in tragedy (*Ain't Them Bodies Saints*, *The Assassination of Jesse James*, *The Killer Inside Me*). What is new this time is restraint. Lee has cultivated a life that's like he's trapped within a sensory deprivation tank. Only when his brother's death prompts a return to the

title sequence port town of Manchester is his back story teased out, and so too his particular reason for bowing out of human entanglements.

Enter Patrick (Hedges), the boy from the boat who is now a fatherless teenager. Bereavement aside, Patrick has an enviably full and healthy life: school, friends, hockey team, a band, two girlfriends. His alcoholic mother is AWOL so it falls to Lee to at least temporarily act as guardian. Lonergan, with the help of his committed cast, buries his emotional landmine deep within the sprawl of everyday life. Each scene brims with self-contained humour and drama, regardless of whether it moves the story along or simply fills in background colour. Moment-by-moment there are absorbing pleasures rooted in Lonergan's command of dialogue. As in his previous features, 2000's *You Can Count on Me*, and 2011's *Margaret*, characters communicate with a zinging curtness that would be bruising if not for the compassion extended in small attentive acts.

An hour in and the emotional landmine goes off. It changes everything and nothing. We learn why Lee is no longer with his ex-wife Randi (Michelle Williams). The moving nature of this film relates to individual moments rather than a grand arc. Williams has a flair for vulnerability. Affleck has access to such ravages that it makes you wonder about the state of his soul. Hedges is a young master of comic timing. Lonergan catches you in the minutiae of ordinary living, so when the emotion of extraordinary tragedy suddenly erupts, it is stunning. **SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN**



CLAUDIA MARIE
MANCHESTER MA

Kenneth Lonergan

The *Manchester by the Sea* writer/director reveals how he creates, builds and develops his characters.

An army of cinephiles amassed in 2011 to defend the honour of Kenneth Lonergan, whose incredible film *Margaret* had been dumped by its distributor. So it's almost too sweet that he returned in 2016 with a film that has become a major player in the award season flurry – *Manchester by the Sea*. The film sees a man named Lee Chandler, played by Casey Affleck, forced to return to the location of the title to face some demons from his past.

LWLies: Why is Lee Chandler a guy instead of a woman? Lonergan: It just came in naturally. I don't think in terms of, 'I want to write a story about a man or a woman', I think of once the character presents himself or herself, there he or she is. The idea of the story was brought to me by John Krasinski and Matt Damon and it was a man. I liked the idea of the story and it never crossed my mind to make him a woman because by the time he was a character, there he was.

Is it very different to write for men and women? No I don't think it's any different at all, any different from writing one character or his brother, nephew, friend, uncle, boss.

So writing for Michelle Williams' character in this film, there was no different impulse that came to you? No. I think the requirement for me is to have a vivid picture in my mind of a human being and, if I don't have that, I have to thrash around until I find it. Once I've found it it doesn't make a difference whether it's a man or a woman or child or an adult. As long as I can see and hear the person in my mind then I'm in good shape, I can write down what they say and then I can think of them like a human being like any other. When I don't have a good idea I have to do a bit more work, but when it's going well it's like having a sort of daydream that you write down.

Does the casting of actors have any impact on the formulation on the character? Sometimes. I actually thought Matt was going to be playing this part while I was writing the script so I had him in mind physically. But, you know, I've been doing this for a while now. I've only made three movies, but I've written a number of films and I've written a number of plays so you get very used to the idea that when one actor becomes unavailable or it doesn't work out for some reason, it's very easy for me to switch off the image of the actor as married to the character and put someone else in their place. If it's a play, once the play is performed, or once the film is made, especially when it's a film, which is unlikely to be remade, especially by me, then the imaginary figure that I had in my head immediately becomes very closely wedded to the actor who he or she portrays. When I think of the characters in *You Can Count On Me*, I don't think of imaginary characters, I think of Mark Ruffalo and Laura Linney. And it's the same for this film, I think that the actors always become the characters once they've gone through all the effort of the performance.

Do you see any kind of connection between Lee Chandler and Lisa Cohen from *Margaret*, and do you see your work as having a kind of connectivity to it? I do when I look back at it, I don't when I'm writing it. I try not to think of anything beyond believing in the reality that I'm inventing. I don't actually see many similarities between the two characters you mentioned, but I mean I'm clearly only one person with my interests and the limits of my imagination, so there's similarities between many of the characters that I've made up. But I try as hard as I can to make people believe that it's real. So if they're real then it means they don't have any other relationship to other fictional characters, whether I made them up or someone else did.

Do you see *Manchester by the Sea* as a ghost story? The genre of ghost stories has no resonance for me whatsoever, but I can see why you might think that. Lee is not really haunted by ghosts, he's carrying round a burden from his past.

Why don't you like ghost stories? I don't know, I was just never that interested in them. I don't know why. I like Hamlet. I like the *The Ghost and Mrs Muir*, somewhat. I don't know, I never found them that interesting. I don't know why.

Does it extend to all kind of fantasy genre, or is it just very specifically the idea of ghosts? Yeah there are certain genres that just don't grab my interest. Ghost stories are one, although there are some exceptions. Horror movies? I don't care for them. They scare me too much. I like suspenseful movies and I love fantasy and science fiction, so it's not the unreality involved. I'm not that interested in murder mysteries, with some exceptions. I don't know why, I have nothing against them, they're just not for me.

The film contains a key flashback sequence at about the half-way point. How do you feel about the term flashback? It doesn't bother me. It's out of fashion now, but I don't care about that. They're flashbacks, but the truth is they're specifically memories. They're not flashbacks to tell the audience what happened as much as they are a look into his mind and what he's thinking about. Of course there's a certain amount of suspense, I think, that's built up in wondering what's wrong with him. He's very peculiar in the way he behaves at the beginning of the film. In fact he's rather strange all through the film because he's so rigidly trying to keep everyone else at bay. And you learn why this is, but you learn it as he's remembering it, and that's the guide for when we go into the past 🌀



Hacksaw Ridge

Directed by
MEL GIBSON
Starring
ANDREW GARFIELD
VINCE VAUGHN
HUGO WEAVING
Released
27 JANUARY

2

ANTICIPATION.

Is this the time we forgive and forget Mel's various atrocities?

4

ENJOYMENT.

Well no, but he's back with a sizzling, heartfelt piece of misty-eyed Americana.

4

IN RETROSPECT.

A stirring modern war picture with an intriguing moral twist.

It's true, Mel Gibson does love to make movies about men who bare an uncanny resemblance to Jesus Christ. Hell, 2004's pseudo-snuff aria *The Passion of the Christ* is directly about our lord and saviour, specifically how the horrific suffering he purportedly endured resembled an extreme French horror movie from the '90s. It transpires, though, that Gibson's fervent religiosity does not mix well with alcohol, and following various verbal infractions of the racist/misogynist variety, he was sent to the Hollywood naughty step, to put it glibly. But now, the Aussie controversy magnet we all love to hate is back with a big bushy beard and, to make matters even more complex, he's swaggered through the gate with the best film of his career under his arm.

Hacksaw Ridge is a work of caustic earnestness, so much so that you might have to look a little harder to uncover its teasingly subversive core. Andrew Garfield channels a pointedly emotional performance style redolent of saturated 1950s melodrama. He plays Desmond Doss, a peppy conscientious objector from Virginia who enlists in the US army to fight the Japanese hoards in Okinawa on the proviso that he can do so without the aid of a rifle. His peers find him to be a ridiculous prat. They believe he's a liberal subversive trying to make a mockery of the time-honoured rite of spilling blood for king and country. Yet he is a true-blue patriot, and wants to express himself by helping his fellow man rather than turning him into a slurry of gore.

The title of the film refers to a key tactical point at the top of a precarious cliff face. For those who peek their tin helmet over the lip at the top of a scramble

net, it's good night with a bullet. The first half of the film deals with Doss's attempts to secure a post in the army that caters for his special moral objections, while the second is when we get to the dust-up. On a purely technical level, Gibson excels in just layering up flashes of visual excitement. His take on grunt-level warfare is pummelling and dirty. Human flesh tears, blood arcs and innards splay, and not purely for the purposes of visceral kicks, but as a psychological challenge to the survivors.

It might seem that Doss's utterly selfless bravery on the field instantly equates him with Christ, but that's not the case. *Hacksaw Ridge* is a film that lightly, nervously sketches the line between insanity and spirituality. Is it beyond the pale to believe that God exists as a personal protector? And if so, does that mean that dashing alone onto a battlefield in the name of humanist duty is the wise thing to do? The thorny subject of drone warfare has become a recent staple of films about modern conflict, specifically the notion of killing while keeping your hands clean. *Hacksaw Ridge* reveals that belief as a dangerous fallacy, suggesting that if you really want to destigmatise murder, this is the only way to do it. It's Gibson's strongest film because it is also his most ambiguous, unwilling to preach or draw trite comparisons between modern era deities and the fables of the Bible. It's a fascinating story, told with a fire and urgency that some may construe as a little square. Even cinematic angel of death Vince Vaughn puts in a strong innings as a hard-nosed but essentially compassionate drill sergeant, so this may be the gift that keeps on giving. **DAVID JENKINS**



Jackie

Directed by
PABLO LARRAÍN
Starring
NATALIE PORTMAN
PETER SARSGAARD
GRETA GERWIG
Released
20 JANUARY

3

ANTICIPATION.

Not usually into biopics but this is Pablo Larraín so forget the 'usual'.

5

ENJOYMENT.

Well done everyone.

4

IN RETROSPECT.

Clever, beautiful images about a clever, beautiful image-maker.

Jackie is not a conventional biopic. Expectations may veer towards a film about the aftermath of JFK's assassination told from the perspective of his widow, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, to be based around tubthumping emotional climaxes. Instead, Chilean director Pablo Larraín riffs on the First Lady's poised appearance, showing the will required to keep control in the worst of circumstances. The result is a gorgeous, layered portrait of a woman determined to put public image ahead of private feelings.

The goal of communicating different layers of Jackie's character is clear from the starting pistol. Natalie Portman, with cheekbones jutting, walks through pristine, monied 1960s surroundings to Mica Levi's orchestral score. The music is riven with primal darkness, swooping to hold in the murky heartbreak. Incongruence between the wild sound and chic vision indicates the ambitions of a filmmaker who crafts images of people while remaining mindful that auto-portraits are made from messier material.

Jackie is Larraín's first English-language film and the one with most mainstream potential thanks to the casting of Portman. Still, it retains a sinewy intelligence that is the director's trademark. From his second feature, 2008's *Tony Manero*, about a *Saturday Night Fever*-obsessed killer in '70s Chile, up to his forthcoming film, the poetic *Neruda* (out in the UK in April), Larraín has made character studies that trust audiences to search the sweep of a film for meaning, using the formal potential of cinema to explore what people are like, rather than saddling an actor with revelatory baggage.

Portman's performance harmonises with Larraín's vision of affectation and depth. On the one hand she, in her Chanel suits and with a studied accent, is as stylised as the White House interiors and the film's picture-perfect composition. On the other hand, she is ragged with grief. That her feelings are sublimated beneath matters of state make them all the more poignant.

The personal, political and psychological form a cross-pollinating motor that is expressed mainly through hushed conversations. Peter Sarsgaard is unrecognisable as Bobby Kennedy beneath a thatch of hair and dignified physicality. It's a thrill to watch considered portrayals of the Kennedys ('the beautiful people') but lest the picture fly away into shallowness, Noah Oppenheim's script drops anchor in the matter of Jackie's identity – a chimera. *LIFE* journalist Theodore H White (Billy Crudup) has the access, but with terms. Most of the people around the FLOTUS deal with a professional concerned with formalities. Jackie's personal secretary and friend, Nancy (Greta Gerwig) offers warmth and is thanked with a lowered-guard. The Priest (John Hurt) enables access to her spiritual gloom.

There is no resolution, no baby pink inner kernel of Jackie to take away. What endures are images – images of the inevitable pain of being this woman at this time. These amount to Jackie showering off her husband's blood, Jackie's face in the window of a car that reflects droves of bystanders, Jackie changing into her red dress to dance in sorrow to 'Camelot'.

SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN



Sing

Directed by

CHRISTOPHE LOURDELET
GARTH JENNINGS

Starring

MATTHEW MCCONAUGHEY
REESE WITHERSPOON
SETH MACFARLANE

Released

27 JANUARY

3

ANTICIPATION.

*An animated singing competition?
At least it's directed by the great
Garth Jennings.*

4

ENJOYMENT.

*Unabashed fun, but with
a subtle, human message
underneath all the wailing.*

3

IN RETROSPECT.

*A modest family feature that
offers more than empty flash.*

When it comes to modern cinemagoing, feature animation is now part of the furniture, with studios like Pixar in particular finding huge audiences with their emotional, cross-generational crowd pleasers. Other production houses are attempting to surf this wave with alternative, even parodic versions of family-oriented movies. In the midst of this meta mess is a film whose modesty belies how clever and engaging it is. Garth Jennings and Christophe Lourdelet's *Sing* is that film, and it arrives as a breath of fresh air. The title itself is extremely straightforward but points directly at the beautiful simplicity of the film's central conceit: if singing makes you feel like a million bucks, then sing goddam it.

No one is more aware of that ad hoc mantra than Buster Moon (voiced by an uncharacteristically cheerful Matthew McConaughey), a theatre director who, despite economic difficulties, never gives up his love of show business. His optimism first manifests as a simple kiddie movie trope, yet the story progressively imbues it with a sense of gravitas and meaning which paints a realistic and hopeful portrait of entertainers and the energy that drives them. Moon's challenge sees him contending with the fact that every other character has to face the dilemma: commit to artistic dreams or continue with your complicated life?

More personal issues are explored through the animals taking part in Moon's singing competition. Each is realised with great detail and a surprising level of realism. From the pressures of housewifery to the challenges of father-son relationships, in under two hours, Jennings explores the spectrum of human experience with a startling, unapologetic refusal to

round off the edges. Rosita (Reese Witherspoon) struggles with her 25 piglets but the film doesn't take the easy route of blaming her husband for not helping her in the house.

The not-quite epic yet exciting adventure progresses according to the basic, pragmatic idea that every character does his or her best given their circumstances, which doesn't mean there is no place for spectacular action and striking emotion. In fact, capitalising on the randomness of life occupies such a primary place in the story that it makes for occasionally awkward tonal shifts, but most often fascinating twists and mood swings. When porcupine Ash (Scarlett Johansson) realises that her boyfriend and bandmate may not be what she needs, her creativity helps her mourn that relationship and become someone she never thought she could or even wanted to be.

Shifts in temperament are echoed in the film's indiscriminating soundtrack which navigates playfully between modern pop (the censoring of Nicki Minaj's crude lyrics is cleverly and happily dodged) and old classics as crooned by the charming but arrogant Mike (Seth MacFarlane) whose rendition of 'My Way' is pure swoon material. Modern musicals tend to follow Baz Luhrmann's perilous path of remixing hits by altering their genre, often showing a deeply confusing and offensive misunderstanding of what made the original song so successful. There is no such butchery here. Every register is respected and matches a personality. Bringing together Katy Perry and Sinatra, Jennings quietly varnishes his exploration of life and passion with a subtle humanism, offering a point of entry for all tastes and all dreams. **MANUELA LAZIC**



A Monster Calls

Directed by

JA BAYONA

Starring

LEWIS MACDOUGALL

LIAM NEESON

FELICITY JONES

Released

1 JANUARY

2

ANTICIPATION.

Oh no, not another young adult-oriented cash grab.

4

ENJOYMENT.

A determinedly weird and macabre exploration of mortality.

4

IN RETROSPECT.

Makes you feel like there might be more life in the old YA engine yet.

Gawky pre-teen boys heading on a fantastical voyage of discovery from the safety of their bedroom? Change the record will you. We're living in a world of Potter pretenders, a restless search to find the next googly-eyed boy wizard who is able save us all from some cranky old British character actor. While JA Bayona's *A Monster Calls* looks to be a 'type' of movie, one cleaving to the generic zeitgeist with every breath in its body, the truth is something quite different. Patrick Ness has adapted his own macabre 2011 illustrated novel for the screen, and the result is an entirely new kind of YA saga – sensitive rather than superficial, creative rather than prosaic, humane rather than trading on single-serving heroes with zero personality.

Just to look at bedraggled latchkey loner Conor (Lewis MacDougall), you immediately know something's up. Bullied, depressed, waiting desperately for life to land him with a juicy trump card, he finds consolation in drawing pictures. He lives with his mother (Felicity Jones) who is suffering from some kind of illness. She smothers him in her love, perhaps in the knowledge that their time together is limited. The film's heartbreaking depiction of an ultra tactile mother-son relationship is what powers the drama. And it's Jones who does most of the emotional heavy lifting, never allowing her character to wallow in unearned sentimentality or lapse into high-frequency melodrama. It's a mighty performance, possibly her best yet.

Yet Conor is the main focus. He gazes from

his window toward the nothingness of the night. He spies a graveyard on a hillside in the middle distance. An old tree, up there on the horizon, begins to stir. It lifts up from its roots, stands tall and stomps across the landscape. It nabs Conor from his bed like some sort of arboreal King Kong and begins to talk – with the husky tones of Liam Neeson, no less. An initial burst of furious anger gives way to a more thoughtful discourse. Conor believes the tree monster to be a figment of his vivid imagination, but the tree claims otherwise. The tree promises to tell his young captor three tales, each of which is intended help him to see life with more clarity. Each miniature fable is rendered as an unspeakably beautiful and wholly original digital animation. How Bayona manages to drop these gorgeous asides into the broader drama and still retain the film's singular sweep is nothing short of miraculous. It helps that the shorts themselves are, each one, a work of high art in their own right.

It's when *A Monster Calls* glides into its final act that everything falls into place. Conor's rite of passage is actually more like a terrifying baptism of fire – as it should be. The film ponders out loud how teenagers are able to cope with death when they could never be expected to understand its true gravity. It's not about learning a single, cover-all truth which helps to soothe all ills. It's about accepting the many lessons that come from our banal daily interactions, whether that's with a revolting school bully, a well-meaning but swaddling grandparent, or a fire-breathing tree monster. **DAVID JENKINS**



Jessica Barden

The 2017 London Short Film Festival are lauding the amazing work of this rising star of the Brit scene.

Jessica Barden has a lot of energy. The 24-year-old actress from Northallerton, North Yorkshire, gives performances that bristle with inner life. This proves to be equally true in an interview in which thoughts spill out in streams. Her highest-profile film work has been in features (*The Lobster*, *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *Hanna*) but roles in short films offer her most compelling work. Ahead of a retrospective of her shorts at the 2017 London Short Film Festival, the once-Olympic athletic hopeful talks to us about what acting means to her.

What was it about acting that made you pursue it instead of running? Do you want to really know why? I was 12 – this is so bad, but – it was that age where you start getting into wearing clothes and fashion. I was really skinny and I hated it so I actually didn't want to do running any more because I didn't like being really skinny. That was literally it. I was like, 'Okay I'll just be an actress then.' I liked having money as well. I liked that I could

earn £20 a week being an extra and I liked being around adults. I enjoyed the experience of being able to talk to people much older than me.

Have you ever had to back out of a project or say no to a director? As you get older something happens. It wasn't anything to do with my career, it was to do with me personally becoming more secure in myself. It happens with everybody, no matter what job you do. You realise that you don't have to work, or spend time with people that you don't want to, and to do so can be detrimental, actually, to your experience. It's never necessarily that I don't like someone, just that it won't be constructive to work with them. It's important to me to work with directors that understand that when I'm on set they're my eyes and ears at a monitor.

There has to be a working relationship where you're both trying to make the same person and tell the same story and they feel confident to come and tell me if some things aren't right and then give me a different direction to go. There are a lot of directors that don't work like that and they're going to be brilliant for other people. Also, in TV jobs, a lot of the people that have the most power are the studio guys or the producers. That doesn't necessarily work with me either because you need a director who is going to manage everybody on set doing the creative part of it and who will have the capacity to direct everybody that's there properly and who can manage all the different voices that they're getting. It's a hard job. I realise that I ask a lot of who I work for but it's because I want to do a lot as well.

Where are you at in figuring out your future? My main goal is that I want to do this for the rest of my life. So right now, and for the next few years, I want to be in a position where I can keep learning as much as possible. The second that you get famous you can't learn privately any more. You can't be in something and be absolutely terrible in it and then go, 'Okay, I probably shouldn't do that again.' That's learning. The second that you get fame and you get a Twitter account made for you and stuff like that is when you become managed. I have never been managed. My agents have only ever cared. That means I can freely choose things. It doesn't matter if I fall flat on my face, and it doesn't matter if I completely triumph. I don't receive a lot of attention which means that I constantly get to learn and that's all I want to do for now.

What do you love about movies? They made me go to school when I was younger. I absolutely flat out hated school and used to go everyday just so that I could come home. I used to love watching Jim Carrey or Robin Williams movies. I would watch *The Mask* or *Mrs Doubtfire* or *Ace Ventura* and then go to school the next day and be like, 'How would Ace Ventura act in this situation?' You get to have these best friends and they're not real so they can't destroy your friendship. They can get you through a day and they can get people through awful situations. A movie never changes. You can always put that on and it's always going to give you that feeling of why you first fell in love with it and it's always going to be a friend 🌟

Jessica Barden – Rising Star + Q&A is presented by the London Short Film Festival, 12 January, 6.30pm, ICA Cinema, shortfilms.org.uk

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César Vayssié *UFE (unfilmévènement)* 2016 film still detail.
Courtesy the artist





The Fits

Directed by
ANNA ROSE HOLMER
Starring
ROYALTY HIGHTOWER
ALEXIS NEBLETT
LAUREN GIBSON
Released
FEBRUARY TBC

3

ANTICIPATION.

Such a literal title leaves little to the imagination.

4

ENJOYMENT.

Female hysteria revisited from a fresh angle.

4

IN RETROSPECT.

A striking oddity that lingers like a dream.

Punches are swapped for pirouettes and the side effects of hysteria in Anna Rose Holmer's debut feature film, about a young tomboy who joins an all-girl dance troupe. Ten year old Toni (Royalty Hightower) is training to be a boxer – one who stands in the centre of the ring, steely faced, administering powerful and precise punches. Inspired by her older brother Jermaine (Da'Sean Minor), she begins to watch the dance troupe that practice next door with growing fascination. A seed of curiosity blossoms within her. When she decides to join their ranks, a mysterious plague strikes the older girls. They begin falling to the floor and fitting, jerking and foaming at the mouth.

Their routines aren't exactly delicate – The Lionesses stomp, thump and crump with as much fiery aggression as the boys who box. But Toni isn't quite able to catch the beat, contorting her bony body and awkwardly adorning herself with the markers of girl-ness. Accompanied by new friend and charming comic foil Beezy (Alexis Neblett), she pierces her ears (with a safety pin) and steps into a sequined leotard. But these feminine decorations never stick. Toni peels a temporary tattoo from her bicep, picks off the gold polish from her fingernails and takes out the earrings, which become infected. Tomboyishness is a recurring theme in coming-of-age films that feature black girls (*The Fits* features an all African-American cast). From titles like Spike Lee's *Crooklyn* to Gina Prince-Bythewood's *Love and Basketball* and beyond, the female protagonists find themselves caught between gendered spaces. Prepubescent Toni possesses the ability to move between these spaces without fixing herself comfortably in either

– partly due to Hightower's commanding and quietly forceful presence.

Writer/director Holmer's decision to limit most of the action to the community centre where both the dancers and the boxers train creates a private world, sealed off from parents and teachers who remain out of the frame at all times. The gym, the locker room, the winding, labyrinthine hallways are often empty. Cinematographer Paul Yee almost always ensures Toni is visually dislocated from the other elements – human or otherwise – within the frame. Further dissonance is created by use of music. Holmer resists relying on pop cues, allowing, Danny Bensi and Saunder Jurriaans's jagged, atonal score to control the woozy atmosphere instead. (The composing duo created similarly discordant soundscapes for wacky wannabe B-movie *Enemy* and cult-themed thriller *Martha Marcy May Marlene*.)

Some may find the film's lean running time of 72 minutes too slight, though Holmer's early instinct for brevity is a smart one. The storytelling is elegantly economical, characterised by a looseness and a spontaneity that's rooted in authenticity. By collaborating with real life dance team The Q-Kidz and the Cincinatti community in which the film is set, Holmer creates the feeling that anything can happen. As for the fits themselves, Holmer is careful when it comes to offering literal explanations for the events on screen. She resists delivering direct statements, instead trusting viewers to draw their own conclusions and answer the question at the core of her film: why is being a teenage girl so traumatic?

SIMRAN HANS



Certain Women

Directed by
KELLY REICHARDT
Starring
LILY GLADSTONE
KRISTEN STEWART
LAURA DERN
Released
3 MARCH

5

ANTICIPATION.
One of America's greatest filmmakers returns.

5

ENJOYMENT.
One of America's greatest filmmakers does her thing.

5

IN RETROSPECT.
Still one of America's greatest filmmakers.

When you see Kelly Reichardt's *Certain Women* the first thing you'll want to do when you leave the cinema is purchase and eat a big ol' hamburger. In the third of three hushed anecdotes concerning the everyday struggles of a clutch of Montanian women, Kristen Stewart's wayfaring supply teacher has to erotically scarf down a plate of diner food prior to an all-night drive across the state. There is, obviously, something cinematically seductive about the idea of Stewart chewing on a burger, and Reichardt knows it. She has Lily Gladstone's desperately lonely horse wrangler sat opposite, watching on in veiled delight, twitching her fingers, doing her best to conceal some thumping emotions of her own. The director trusts the audience to spot her play – there are no grotesque close-ups, no unnecessary stresses of detail, no music, no hand-holding. The conversation plays out but the words don't matter. The sight-lines and the points at which they momentarily intersect are what we should be looking for.

This is what Reichardt does. She takes the classical, unabashed romance that litters old studio movies and places it into a reality that remains a few decibels quieter than the norm. Just as her 2008 masterpiece, *Wendy and Lucy*, offered a heartswelling survey of provincial America through the eyes of a woman searching for her lost dog, *Certain Woman* does similar things with the courtroom drama, the family comedy and the sweeping melodrama of unrequited love. The stories in the film are adapted from Maile Meloy's beautiful 2009 compendium of shorts, 'Both Ways

Is the Only Way I Want It', and confirms that there is life (and then some) beyond Jon Raymond, her trusty co-writer on every film since 2006's *Old Joy*.

The title *Certain Women* encapsulates the idea that the subjects of the film have been carefully selected, that there's connective tissue beyond geographic proximity. Or maybe it's a play on words, that it's about women drifting through life with a stern sense of certainty. Laura Dern's rinky-dink small claims lawyer knows that she wants to separate her private and professional lives, even if a case she's working (involving Jared Harris' injured labourer) won't allow it.

The private and professional cross over with a sense of civic duty in an extremely poignant tale of modern, socially conscious home construction that stars Michelle Williams. Perhaps the most subtly complex of the three, it hinges on the sale of some antique stones from their ageing owner, played by Rene Auberjonois. A short, silly back and forth about the true nature of birdsong may be one of the most moving single passages in the entire Reichardt canon. Finally, private and professional concerns are split between Kristen Stewart and newcomer Lily Gladstone (who, incidentally, is an astonishing find), as both silently wrestle with opposing objectives. One is focused on a career that has no place for fast friendship (or more), while the other works hard with an eye trained on the coiled romance of the night. The film is about desire unfulfilled, desire lost and desire eventually regenerated. It's a heartbreaker, pure and simple.

DAVID JENKINS



20th Century Women

Directed by
MIKE MILLS
Starring
ANNETTE BENING
LUCAS ZUMANN
GRETA GERWIG
Released
20 JANUARY

4

ANTICIPATION.

We liked Beginners. We love Bening and Gerwig.

3

ENJOYMENT.

Patchy, but when it's good it's a consummate delight.

4

IN RETROSPECT.

Mills' perspective on formative relationships is absorbing, and he seems like a great guy.

This is a film best understood as writer/director Mike Mills' attempt to capture his childhood through a fictionalised shaggy-dog comedy drama. Describing it as anchored by reality doesn't convey the freedom given over to a gifted ensemble and the resulting sparks of spontaneity that occasionally burst into a deliriously off-kilter form of humour.

The setting is sunny Southern California in 1979 and 16-year-old Jamie (Lucas Zumann) is surrounded by women. There's his mother Dorothea (Annette Bening), his best friend and long-term crush Julie (Elle Fanning) and their photographer lodger Abbie (Greta Gerwig). In what appears to be a narrative kickstarter, Dorothea – fearing that her son needs more nurturing than she alone can give – gathers up Julie and Abbie around her kitchen table and asks the pair to join her in raising him.

What follows is the meandering process of Jamie spending time with these women in the hope that he might evolve from boy to man. Everyone's life unfolds. Characters influence one another. Personal struggles are met with the attention of those in close proximity. These people irritate one another, argue and then let it go and move on. They try to have whole-hearted fun, even when it goes against their current mood. This is a film with strengths and weaknesses bound up in the same straggly ball. The lack of clear structure affords fresh comedy that appears to come out of nowhere, but it also leads to nothing moments in which character dynamics seem anti-climactic.

More than anything, *20th Century Women* is a gift to the actors who are able to swim around in roomy characters. Mills taps into new sides of Elle Fanning and Greta Gerwig. The former is cast against milk-fed, flaxen-haired, innocent type as a recklessly-promiscuous pursuer of a double life. Meanwhile Gerwig, who so naturally keeps things light, is saddled with a burden that cracks open a new type of vulnerability. Juxtaposed against the dead weight of illness, her creative pursuits amount to a defiant life force; hair dyed red to emulate David Bowie in *The Man Who Fell to Earth* and comedy muscles fine-tuned to a serious pitch as she educates Jamie about clitoral stimulation via weighty feminist tones.

Matriarch of the film, Dorothea, is a muzzier proposition. She has defining habits (smoking, writing down the stocks, laser-focus on Jamie) but it's harder to describe her qualities. Bening blows bohemian character material up as fully as possible, making for a colourful outline rather than a substantial presence. A generous mind would call her elusiveness an in-built component of a mother's mystery. A speculative mind would call it Mills' reverence for replicating all that remained unknown about his real mother.

The above is conjecture, but fidelity to life events truly intrudes on the freewheeling atmosphere in the form of synopses reducing the women's futures to a few lines. It feels like *20th Century Women* is one draft away from a balance between the source material and the fictional.

SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN



The director of *20th Century Women* on a personalised cine-poem written to his late mother.

Here, director Mike Mills talks candidly about the process of recreating real people on the screen for his lovely new film *20th Century Women*. It concerns the lives of three Californian women in the late 1970s.

"*20th Century Women* is all based on real people. Dorothea is based on my mother, Abbie's character is based on my sister and Julie is based on my first girlfriend and a bunch of other girls that would sneak in to my bedroom at night. I was raised in a matriarchy. Dad was around but he wasn't really present. So I had this very strong mother, these very strong older sisters and so I kind of gravitated towards women. In a way it feels very natural. It feels more natural to me to write female characters than male characters. A lot of my emotionality or my true inner life is really easy to transpose on a female character. Actually writing them is a little trickier. And trying to be right and trying to be aware of my limitations as a heterosexual, cisgender male guy, I can't really have the life experience of my mom and all these different people. I wrote *Beginners*

when my dad had just died, so I had a lot of fresh memories. My mom died in '99, so the memories were much more passive. For her I had to just study all these '30s and '40s films because that's what she watched. It really brought her back, because she had that kind of anti-authoritarian humour that all those women had back then – just wisecracking all the time. She was very Hawksian in the way she spoke. And very Bogart, too. She said all the time: 'in my next life, I'm gonna marry Bogart'. Then I kind of realised my mum is Bogart, she was very butch and had a little trans quality to her. She wanted to be a pilot, was a contractor, never did anything feminine.

"I involved my sister, Meg. She helped in the recreation of my mother. She does really great astrology readings where she gets like the exact time of your birth and does your whole chart. Annette Bening [who plays Dorothea] and my mom are both Geminis and I found that really interesting. It all sounds a little new age-y, but what is film but a very long magic trick? And I find it helpful to be alive to the magic that is in acting and that comes from filling your film with real objects. Annette wears my mom's jewellery, lays on my mum's bedspread, stands in front of my mom's painting. I do feel like that enchants the whole space.

"As a director I'm trying to feed my actors and I'm not very precious about it. I'm like, 'here's this story, here's this object, by any means necessary for you, Annette, do whatever you like, run with it. The things that don't relate, that don't feed you, don't worry about it, you're not mimicking my mother. I'm just trying to enable and help you and give you something you can connect with. Something that stirs your soul.'

"The names have a period quality to them. There are certain names that are popular in different times. If you were born in the '20s there were a lot of Dorotheas. But then that's very specifically a reference to Dorothea Lange, the photographer. In *Beginners* there's a shot of a hand holding daisies, and that really is my mom's photo and that's a Dorothea Lange photo. So it's sort of like a personal tie from that movie to this movie. It just fits her really well, like her kind of masculinity, the sound of the name. Like William, I feel like William has a softness to him and sort of like an old fashioned-ness, and it's both the name, the period and just the actual sound of the word. I think it really is important.

"Having your parents die relatively early and all the issues of having a gay dad, they prompt a lot of opportunities to speak about all this stuff and to analyse it. I find it empowering to just talk about. I write about personal material because I feel like it's my best shot at making a good movie. It's my best hope to deliver a unique and authentic comment on what it means to be a human. I'm not trying to make a memoir. It's not therapy. I'm happy to put very personal slant on things because I feel like it charges the film, and the films I love tend to do things like that. In a way I'm just kind of emulating Fellini, and early period Woody Allen. I find that personal stuff has a charge to it that communicates to strangers. It's often the most concrete, specific stuff I put in my movies that ends up being the stuff people talk about. I don't cry on set. Actually, I cried on set a little on this one just because the acting was so great and I love shooting so much. But it's not therapy for me and I really don't want it to be, 'people all over the world please watch me have therapy' you know. I'm afraid of that" ❄️



Who's Gonna Love Me Now?

Directed by **BARAK HEYMANN, TOMER HEYMANN**
Released **10 MARCH**

Shunned by the religious community in Israel for his homosexuality, Saar Maoz finds himself distanced even further from his family once diagnosed with HIV. He then discovers a new, thriving support system in the form of the London Gay Men's Choir. Israeli filmmakers Barak and Tomer Heymann capture the life of Maoz in the warm and defiant *Who's Gonna Love Me Now?* The directors are concise with their project, each scene chosen carefully to prioritise the important aspects of Maoz's story without wasting minutes on establishing mood or setting. There is an urgency about the storytelling that immediately connects audiences to Saar and the world he inhabits. That world is both vibrant and sparse, cleverly highlighted through juxtaposing shots of the choir and Saar's hometown which at once emphasise the sense of fulfilment and emptiness he is torn between.

The division in his life is clear but the filmmakers are careful not to create villains of his family, with the exception perhaps of one brother who is memorably silenced by his wife over his concerns for the safety of his children should Saar return to the family in Israel. "Excuse me, I'm the mother of our children, and I have to say that I'm not worried" she responds as her husband vocalises his prejudice against his own brother. There are touching moments between Saar and his parents in the simplest and most delicate of scenarios, from grating potatoes for the latkes with his mother to sorting through old letters in the attic with his father, both of whom visit him in London and manage to find comic relief within their despair for their son's condition. It is easy to feel great sympathy for Saar but he is by no means broken or hopeless, looking for avenues to return to the familial love he craves while remaining true to himself and the gay community. If the entire village must hear about his HIV diagnosis, so be it. "I'm 40 fucking years old" he says, "and it's time for me to stand up and say my truth". **CAITLIN QUINLAN**

ANTICIPATION. *The Heymann brothers have been prolific documentary filmmakers for the last decade.*

4

ENJOYMENT. *A well-balanced insight into the intricacies of family and the power of home.*

4

IN RETROSPECT.
Defiant and promising.

4



Prevenge

Directed by **ALICE LOWE**
Starring **ALICE LOWE, KATE DICKIE, JO HARTLEY**
Released **10 FEBRUARY**

However much you might try to coolly downplay it with gift showers, hopeful smiles and 'Baby on Board' badges, pregnancy is an all-consuming state of physical and psychological mutation. A lifetime spent looking out for number one no longer applies, as a woman, for around nine months, literally exists as two bodies. She has to account for the tiny needs of the person growing inside. Like a contemporary, darkly comic riff on Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby*, writer/director and star Alice Lowe channels the copious anxieties that come with childbirth into a quaint urban slasher yarn. She is exceptional as Ruth, an enigmatic mother-to-be who is driven to murder by a squeaky, swearsy voice emanating from her swelling baby bump. She returns to her greyscale hotel room and lounges on her bed, laptop flipped open as she rewatches a sequence from Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur's 1934 noir, *Crime Without Passion*, in which a woman in waving chiffon robes floats towards the camera, wailing like a banshee. She assumes new personas for each highly targeted kill, and yet Lowe manages to create a sadsack base character who retains a measure of empathy through the thick mist of blood and gore.

Where *Prevenge* cleverly ticks off a list of stock traumas that come from the birthing process, it comes into its own as an furious political jeremiad against the ways in which women are too often suppressed socially and professionally on gender grounds. Though the film wears its feminism lightly, its all the more trenchant for that relative subtlety, lending Ruth's seedy rampage a tinge of melancholy. Formally, it's a little rough around the edges, and the mechanics of each murder sometimes lack for sophistication, but it nevertheless charges along with a defiant bluster. It's quite something for a debut feature, and right out of the gates Lowe proves herself to be a natural director of actors, with not a single weak spot on the performance front. **DAVID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION. *As an actor, Alice Lowe has become a sign of quality. But can she direct?*

3

ENJOYMENT. *Hells yes. A genuinely grotesque and original idea that never panders to genre expectation.*

4

IN RETROSPECT. *The ending is a doozy. Roll on film number two.*

4



It's Only the End of the World

Directed by **XAVIER DOLAN**
 Starring **GASPARD ULLIEL, VINCENT CASSEL,**
MARION COTILLARD
 Released **24 FEBRUARY**

We all have off days. Those moments where, as hard as you might try, nothing seems to come out right. Xavier Dolan's fifth feature, an adaptation of a 1990 stage play by the late Jean-Luc Lagarce, is by some margin his least successful directorial effort, and that's putting it lightly. The experience of watching this film equates to being tied-up and ball-gagged in the middle of an unsupervised children's party at which all attendees have consumed dangerous quantities of bright, Tartrazine-based fluid. Shriill isn't the world. Tungsten-plated ear muffs are needed to get through this one.

Willoway fop Gaspard Ulliel is a prodigal son who makes a rare return to the family nest. He has news. Gathered up for a sit-down meal is his shrill mother (Nathalie Baye in a Lou-Lou wig), his violently shrill brother (Vincent Cassel plus flying saliva), his unhinged and shrill sister (Lea Seydoux), and his mousy sister-in-law (Marion Cotillard, who seems to be in a different movie altogether). They're thrown together in a room and they bellow at one another for 90 excruciating minutes.

Everybody talks and nobody listens. The clock ticks as our hero fights through the mire of verbiage to say his piece. Dolan makes it impossible to see who's addressing who by filming the whole thing in boundary-encroaching close-ups. He also makes it impossible to attain a sense of perspective. Major talent on both sides of the camera is squandered in search of producing a film that's so aggressively annoying that it is painful to sit through. It achieves this sick goal with firey gusto. The film starts loud and gets louder. It communicates the irritation of family gatherings by emulating that sense of irritation, which is neither big nor clever. It's obvious and deeply cynical. Have a double dose of Ibuprofen ready for when the credits roll.

DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION. *Xavier Dolan returns with his most star-spangled cast to date.*

3

ENJOYMENT.
As they say in France, tres horrible.

1

IN RETROSPECT.
A film to show to your mortal enemy.

1



Best

Directed by **DANIEL GORDON**
 Starring **GEORGE BEST, PADDY CRERAND,**
MIKE SUMMERBEE
 Released **24 FEBRUARY**

Weeks before his death in 2005, George Best insisted that people remember him for his football skills and "forget all the rubbish" that made him infamous. A new documentary about his life makes that seem unlikely. *Best* opens with ex-wife Angie recalling the time she mistook her husband for a tramp, setting up the story of a prodigious talent prone to self-sabotage. But the foreshadowing proves unnecessary. Even during Best's ascent at Manchester United in the 1960s – becoming football's first pop star at 19 – reporters keep asking if all the attention and pressure will become unbearable. As it inevitably does, the film maps out that downward spiral effectively.

A procession of talking heads – former lovers, agents and teammates – portray him as an enigmatic figure addicted to women and alcohol, while Best's own voice, pulled from previous interviews, sounds remarkably candid and self-aware. But as much as the material feels carefully curated, there are gaps. Callum Best, the Northern Irishman's only son, as well as Denis Law and Sir Bobby Charlton, his teammates at Manchester United, are missing. The fact that Best's scattershot career took him to clubs in England, Scotland, Ireland, the US, South Africa, Australia and Hong Kong – sometimes playing just one game – isn't clearly communicated.

At one point the film jumps forward to his death from multiple organ failure over 20 years later, aged 59, before working backwards with passing mentions of domestic violence and a prison sentence for drink driving. If that uneven structure is intended to lighten the load, it doesn't succeed. No matter where you place the parts, Best's path to self-destruction feels wearing. It leaves you wondering not only what might have been, but how Best could have believed that football would be the only thing people remember him for. **CIAN TRAYNOR**

ANTICIPATION.
This story has been told before.

3

ENJOYMENT.
A substantial if uneven account of an icon's downfall.

3

IN RETROSPECT. *A harrowing insight into the nature of celebrity.*

3



Endless Poetry

Directed by
ALEJANDRO JODOROWSKY
Starring
BRONTIS JODOROWSKY
ADAN JODOROWSKY
PAMELA FLORES
Released
6 JANUARY

4

ANTICIPATION.

Jodorowsky is our main man!

3

ENJOYMENT.

Some fine touches of madness, but haven't we seen this before?

3

IN RETROSPECT.

An artist's rite of passage, familial but also familiar.

“I thought you had changed, but you're still the same man,” complains Sara (Pamela Flores), near the beginning of Alejandro Jodorowsky's *Endless Poetry*, to her unloving, bullying husband Jaime (Brontis Jodorowsky). On one level Sara's words serve as a reflexive joke. For, like every single film in Jodorowsky's oeuvre (since he debuted in 1968 with *Fando y Lis*), this latest feature concerns the individual quest for identity, meaning and transcendence in a world of vanity and illusion. After decades of experimenting in a variety of genres (from the western in *El Topo* to the slasher in *Santa Sangre*), and then a 23-year hiatus from filmmaking, Jodorowsky returned in 2013 with *The Dance of Reality*. As an autobiographical work tracing the director's childhood in Tocopilla, Chile, it ostensibly marked a change in the man's output, but in fact displayed the same spirit of metaphysical questing found in all his previous works, as both the young Jodorowsky and his father Jaime are shown undergoing transformative journeys. *Plus ça change...*

Endless Poetry is both sequel and sort-of remake to *The Dance of Reality*, as it shows the young Jodorowsky undergoing further formative rites of passage in Santiago – rites that, apparently, never really end, but are merely lent arbitrary calibration by closing credits. If it picks up exactly where *The Dance of Reality* left off, with Jodorowsky departing in a boat for a new future, that is also more or less where it ends: another boat, another future, another stage in the same journey. In this circular portrait of the artist as a young man, Jodorowsky's principal

theme is the permanence of impermanence. Despite his past metamorphosis, Jaime has returned to being a petty patriarch, running his new little shop once more like a fascist regime, and hoping that 'Alejandrito' will become a doctor rather than a 'faggot' poet. Again Sara is a font of nurturing compassion, her separateness from the world's cruelties and vices marked by the way that she sings her every line in a soprano voice.

In a fit of rebellious anger, Alejandro (Jodorowsky's son, Adan) literally chops down his family tree in the back garden. It is a vain attempt to sever domestic ties and branch out on his own – but he can never quite shake his roots, and with his strivings for independence and change come certain fixed continuities. Accordingly his first lover, the poetess Stella Díaz Varín, is portrayed by the selfsame actress who plays his mother, while his father is played by another of his sons – and Alejandro's failure, even now, to leave behind his parents' influence is suggested by the very existence of two feature films devoted to their memory. Jodorowsky appears as himself again, ghosting his younger incarnation as a guardian angel from the future, while also using this film to stage his own psychological flotsam – in a Brechtian world where the Santiago of the past is evoked by an overtly set-dressed present, and black-clothed stagehands visibly pass props to the players. In this theatre of the absurd, though, the younger Alejandro proves so supine and unengaging a character that a different kind of endlessness quickly asserts itself.

ANTON BITEL



Denial

Directed by
MICK JACKSON
Starring
RACHEL WEISZ
TIMOTHY SPALL
TOM WILKINSON
Released
27 JANUARY

3

ANTICIPATION.

Prestigious cast and Holocaust theme point to awards bait, but it is written by David Hare.

3

ENJOYMENT.

At its best in court, where the cast can get their teeth into the dialogue.

3

IN RETROSPECT.

The gnarly subject matter brings its own rewards, but gestures towards accessibility prove counter-productive.

If this wasn't based on an actual court case from 1996, it might sound like the sort of script that gets written in search of awards silverware. Here, the legal team defending a heroic academic against the Nazi-apologist rival who says she libelled him, have to prove that the Holocaust really existed in order that truth and justice prevail.

Such are the caprices of English libel law, that US author Deborah Lipstadt (Rachel Weisz, slightly effortful speaking in Brooklynese) is startled the onus is on her to demonstrate she correctly accused show-boating historian David Irving (Timothy Spall, oleaginous but no caricature) of deliberately denying the deaths of millions of Jews during World War Two. However, as we learn from an early sequence in a university class she teaches, this isn't quite as simple as it sounds. Lipstadt herself is well aware there are no existing photographs or film of victims perishing in the gas chambers – so how do we know beyond doubt that the Holocaust took place in the way we understand it?

That's pretty heavy-duty fare for a middlebrow drama with a clear remit to entertain as well as educate, and notwithstanding the efforts of esteemed playwright David Hare in adapting the material for the screen, the movie rather buckles under the strain. A preparatory visit to Auschwitz with her old-school posh-Scots silk (Tom Wilkinson, impeccable as ever), for instance, swiftly flags up director Mick Jackson's aesthetic swithering over just how much sentimental empathy to press home. On the one hand,

Wilkinson's fierce legal mind admits that even the remaining presence of the buildings themselves isn't controvertible proof of what really went on within their walls, yet Jackson pushes on, interspersing brief ghostly flashes of emaciated prisoners in archive footage – and indeed a button-pushing image of a raindrop dripping off the fence, as if the barbed-wire itself were shedding a tear for the sights it's seen.

True, these are relatively brief moments, yet in a post-*Shoah* celluloid landscape, and within the context of a legal case which privileges documented fact over the emotional arm-twisting of large-scale human tragedy, they do seem desperately out of place. So too at times does Weisz's presumed status as the story's standard-bearing protagonist, since her steely eyed solicitor (Andrew Scott on artfully astringent form) constructs a legal strategy which keeps her and any of the camp survivors off the stand, leaving her fretting on the sidelines as barrister Wilkinson forensically deconstructs Irving's credibility via serious in-depth research.

The courtroom finale is so tautly assembled and performed it allows the film a final-reel rally, which signals the cast-iron potency of unarguable truth to some effect. No, it can't really salvage the rest of a well-meaning but ungainly slice of 'prestige' cinema, but it does show the value in retelling this particular story at a time when the buzzword 'post-truth' is insouciantly bandied about, giving us pause to consider just how chilling that term really is.

TREVOR JOHNSTON



Loving

Directed by
JEFF NICHOLS
Starring
RUTH NEGGA
JOEL EDGERTON
WILL DALTON
Released
3 FEBRUARY

4

ANTICIPATION.

Jeff Nichols always brings a lot to the table, and tends to elicit great performances from his actors.

4

ENJOYMENT.

Definitely got something in my eye.

4

IN RETROSPECT.

An understated and beautiful story about how ordinary folk took an extraordinary stand.

It's difficult to imagine the police barging into your home, pulling you and your spouse out of bed, and arresting you for the crime of being married. But that's the position in which Mildred and Richard Loving found themselves one summer night back in 1958. He, a white bricklayer, and her, a biracial woman of African heritage, had left their home state of Virginia to tie the knot, knowing full well it was still illegal to do so at home. Their arrests set into motion a nine-year legal battle which would result in a landmark court case over the constitutional feasibility of interracial marriage. In the meantime, the Lovings were barred from entering their home state for some 25 years.

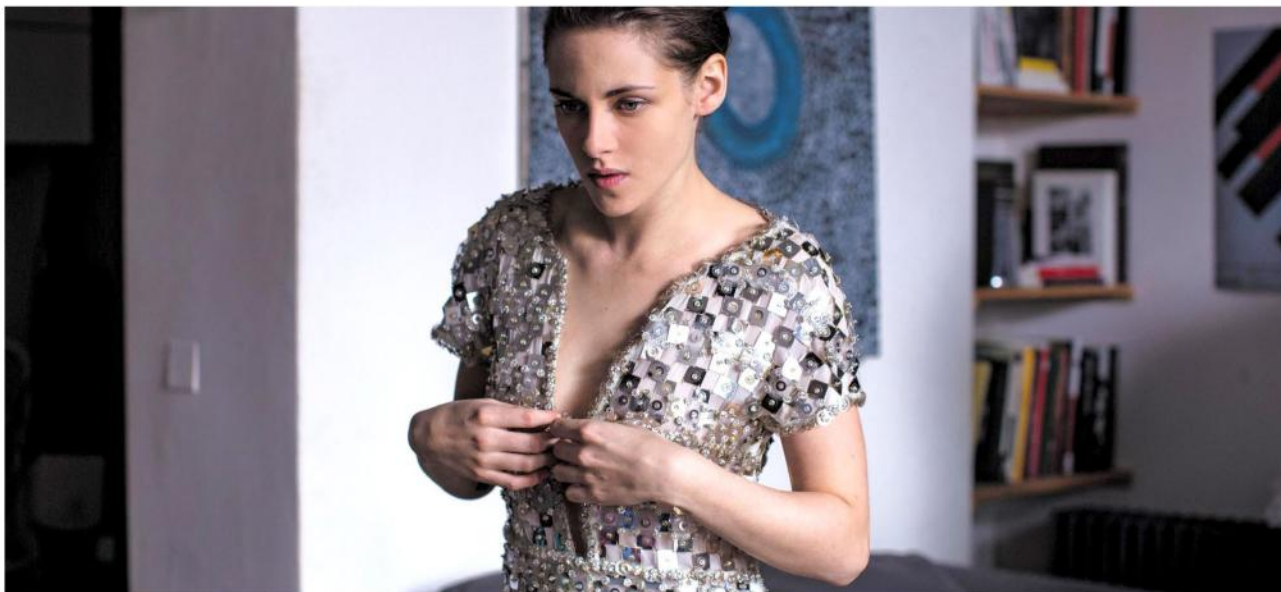
Given the subject matter, this latest from director Jeff Nichols could easily have been stuffed with oversized characters and sentimental courtroom speeches. Instead, he takes the opposite approach. The dialled back performances and lack of formal histrionics make the film's tenderness all the more affecting. The film deals with the common sense demand that a heartfelt marriage be treated with respect. That the personal becomes so deeply political goes without saying, but Nichols takes care never to overemphasise the romantic essence of this story.

A committed Joel Edgerton plays Richard, a simple man with a quiet and surly demeanour. All buzz cut and hard squint, his gruffness is softened by his complete devotion to his wife. Mildred (Ruth Negga) is a softly-spoken housewife with three rambunctious young children underfoot.

But Negga reveals the iron will beneath Mildred's gentle exterior. After the couple's de facto exile, it is Mildred who first sets matters into motion by writing a letter to civil rights champion, Robert Kennedy. But when the ACLU unexpectedly calls with an offer of help, she demurs: "Well, I'll have to speak to my husband."

National newspapermen and camera crews descend on their doorstep. It quickly becomes clear that neither husband nor wife are natural leaders. With that in mind, it's striking that Mildred takes the lead and speaks up, while Richard is tight-lipped and uncomfortable. Is it because she, a black woman, simply feels the sting of exclusion more than her husband ever will? It's apparent that she's fiercely homesick, but her desire to return to the Virginia countryside to raise her children is rooted in much more than that. It's about returning to the home she has chosen for them, making them legitimate in the eyes of the law, and knowing they will grow up to marry whomever they wish.

Nichols has already shown an affinity for the sleepy, pastoral American South, and the greatness of *Loving* is located in his feeling for the couple's very ordinary Southerness. In spite of all the publicity, they have no pretensions toward activism nor any inclination toward making grand statements. Their ambitions are as simple as they come: to maintain their marriage, and do so in their chosen homestead. The insidiousness of any law preventing a family from doing so is plain. The Lovings most special quality is simply that they decided to take a stand. **CHRISTINA NEWLAND**



Personal Shopper

Directed by
OLIVIER ASSAYAS
Starring
KRISTEN STEWART
LARS EIDINGER
SIGRID BOUAZIZ
Released
17 MARCH

4

ANTICIPATION.

Kristen Stewart leads Olivier Assayas' strangely titled new film. Promising.

4

ENJOYMENT.

Occasionally creepy, sometimes ridiculous but always surprising

4

IN RETROSPECT.

The film's strangeness will stay with you and push you to keep on interrogating it.

When it comes to projecting anguish and ambiguity, there is no-one better than Kristen Stewart. In *Personal Shopper*, she offers a refined version of her *Twilight* saga performance, which oscillates between discreet twitchiness and vocal outbursts, as if emotions had to fight against in order to be felt.

Olivier Assayas employs this anxiety-based persona with great precision. He also takes it as a foundation on which to build a complete, multi-faceted character, one that pushes Stewart to further explore her vast acting capabilities. Grief and spirituality become two new strings to her bow, which she uses with (occasionally too much) bravado. Her now-established tense style means that she's never quite there; in *Personal Shopper*, Assayas offers tentative answers as to where exactly she is, placing her character Maureen somewhere between death and a world of ghostly apparitions, as she grieves the passing of her twin brother by waiting for him to give her a sign from beyond the grave. She floats between the earth and the heavens.

Maureen is the personal shopper of the title and eventually returns to the clothes that she buys her client. She tries to benefit from the aggrandising power of fashion and beauty and define herself beyond grief. This shallowness is at odds with the depth of her anguish and spiritualism, but this contrast appears realistic: she is looking for an easy escape from her sadness and tries to anchor herself in physical reality via materialism.

By letting Maureen do things she actually finds despicable and later regrets, Assayas raises her to a tragic and human level. He makes her compelling and inscrutable. However, while the director excels

at conveying the strangeness of her behaviour, he sometimes cannot avoid looking ridiculous himself. This might be because Stewart has now truly become the incarnation of a profound complexity that the trivial satisfaction of a pair of high heels or a glittery dress could not seduce.

This awkwardness also arises from Maureen's search for meaning and the overwhelming (yet authentic) presence of technology. She reads about art on her iPad. She talks to her employer on the phone. She sees her boyfriend via Skype. This interplay between mysticism and tech crescendos in a captivating, creepy yet often amusing sequence during which Maureen has a lengthy text conversation with an unknown number who seems to know a lot about her. It is one of the most accurate cinematic representations of the all-too common practice of texting. By simply showing Maureen going about her various tasks while keeping this bizarre conversation going throughout her day, Assayas reveals the oddness of our way of life. Virtual communication technologies allow us to constantly occupy several spaces at once. Together, the messaging and the ghostly aspect of the story serve to highlight Maureen's displacement.

Yet the film's denouement is too on-the-nose after such a strangely stimulating concoction of materialism, murder and spiritualism. Assayas' perception of technology remains the most intriguing takeaway from *Personal Shopper*: as much as our devices disconnect us from the present of our lived experience, they offer an answer to our search for the unknown.

MANUELA LAZIC



Rules Don't Apply

Directed by

WARREN BEATTY

Starring

ALDEN EHRENREICH

LILY COLLINS

WARREN BEATTY

Released

27 JANUARY

4

ANTICIPATION.

Beatty's first directorial effort in nearly two decades.

3

ENJOYMENT.

One of history's true mad men hijacks a classic romantic comedy.

4

IN RETROSPECT.

An experimental, breathless, and messy passion project demanding of repeat viewings.

What happens when a perfectly lovely romantic comedy gets hijacked by a madman? *Rules Don't Apply* suggests that all sense of direction, emotion, formal structure and expectation are sent spinning, like a compass needle driven mad by a magnetic field. This is exactly what happens about midway through Warren Beatty's nutty directorial effort about two young lovebirds orbiting the lavish world of billionaire mogul Howard Hughes in 1950s Hollywood.

Driver Frank Forbes (Alden Ehrenreich) is instantly attracted to aspiring actress and naïve Virginian Marla Mabrey (Lily Collins) when he picks her up from the airport. She's one of the many beautiful performers placed under contract by Hughes after winning a nationwide talent contest. Accompanied by her devout mother (Annette Bening), Marla quickly reciprocates the tender flirtations and charm lobbed her way by Frank.

For much of their extended meet-cute, Hughes (a hurricane in a suit played by Beatty himself) stays in the shadows yammering at his high ranking employees and making petulant demands, more a vocal spectre than an actual physical presence. Yet the instant he takes an interest in Marla the film's trajectory permanently shifts, mirroring the fleeting whims of a rebel spirit slowly succumbing to insanity. This jarring shift feels daring and experimental. Hughes seduces Frank and Marla in different ways, creating a scenario where the joys of youthful romance are branded with cynicism and suspicion. Characters who once knew how to communicate now find themselves careening down entirely different

wavelengths, left aghast by their inability to connect. An editing scheme that once crackled with energetic short scenes suddenly shows a streak of melancholy that didn't seem possible.

Hughes is a master of sucking the life out of every possibility and using it to sustain his own rapid forward momentum. "You make an old guy courageous," he tells Marla, a wolf carefully sizing up his latest lamb dinner. Beatty gives the character an affable kindness one moment and a tyrant's whine the next. Yet crippling insecurity resides underneath all of Hughes' manic energy. Only endless gallivanting and dangerous stunts can keep it at bay. Like its central figure, *Rules Don't Apply* demands patience. It's a prickly narrative that covers much thematic ground. Communism, capitalism, daddy issues, birth control, DNA, Los Angeles land development, sexism and religion all become critical points of conversation, or distraction depending on your perspective. This pattern reaches critical mass during the film's funniest scene, when Hughes tells Frank the story behind Al Jolson's 'You Ain't Heard Nothing Yet' quote during a reckless plane ride.

Breathless and messy, the film teeters on the edge of oblivion multiple times, running zigzag where others would have opted for walking a straight line. By embracing such a singular sense of style, history, and genre, Beatty fully evokes Frank's aw shucks credo, "There's no harm in having high hopes." *Rules Don't Apply* is an oddly compelling and madcap reminder of all why such aspirations should never grow out of fashion. **GLENN HEATH JR**



The Founder

Directed by

JOHN LEE HANCOCK

Starring

MICHAEL KEATON

LAURA DERN

NICK OFFERMAN

Released

17 FEBRUARY

2

ANTICIPATION.

The terrible feeling that this might be another capitalist success story...

3

ENJOYMENT.

Aesthetically nothing exceptional, but the performances are great and the story just incredible.

4

IN RETROSPECT.

A special, worthwhile film that promises more confrontational Hollywood films in the future.

In 2008, the financial crisis ruined the lives of millions of Americans. Then, in 2012, Martin Scorsese's dizzying satire of greed, *The Wolf of Wall Street*, went widely interpreted as an inspiring gung-ho tale of ruthless success. And only a few months separate us from the election of a well known crook as President of the USA. Yet today, John Lee Hancock's McDonald's origin story *The Founder* presents, at least conceptually, the refreshing possibility of an unambiguous critique of capitalism. In its iconography, business model and global reach, McDonald's represents a short-hand for the economics of American capitalism and cultural imperialism. At the most crucial moment imaginable, Hollywood has the real opportunity to explore the dark side and expose the real consequences of an industry bewitched by big business, raw profit and individual interest.

Yet unlike more straightforward financial satires, *The Founder* presents an alternative. The film indeed goes deeper in its analysis and demonstrates convincingly that the irresponsible pursuit of pure profit has not always been the principal goal of American business. Like all six seasons of *Mad Men* before it, this film conceives of that goal as a relatively recent development. Contemporary America is the world leader when it comes to free enterprise, so the film touches a pretty sensitive nerve in the context of US culture. As the film openly and daringly acknowledges, McDonald's today is such an integral part of American identity, so wrapped up with the concept of profit at the expense of quality, that few would suspect it did not at all start as an exercise in pure avarice.

This is the untold story of two wholesome brothers

whose honest-to-goodness hamburger business was stolen from them and transformed into a global monolith. The film focuses on travelling salesman Ray Kroc (a terrifically committed Michael Keaton), the 'founder' referred to in the film's ironic title. Progressively exploiting humble brothers Dick (Nick Offerman) and Mac (John Carroll Lynch) who came up with the company concept, Kroc is presented as a ruthless specimen. The film's matter-of-factness exposes what Kroc – in pure American Dream parlance – refers to as ambition for the selfish greed that it actually is.

Unusually for what is a conventional Hollywood product (and perhaps for legal reasons) the film often lets the audience fill in blanks with odd narrative ellipses and remarks from characters that inevitably, and with a profoundly sad irony, hint at the state of McDonald's today. When Kroc suggests replacing real ice-cream with cheaper instant solution, Dick remarks, "why not have frozen fries, too?" For a moment, a brutal shadow is cast in this otherwise mild, not particularly confrontational film.

Though it is rather blandly realised, poorly scored and perhaps not aggressive enough when it presents Kroc's obnoxious attitude towards the brothers and his wife Ethel (a criminally under-served Laura Dern), the potential for this surprisingly little-known story to shake American culture to its core makes it a worthwhile enterprise. If this open attack on the baseness that furthers capitalist greed can touch more people that way, and at a point when the ultimate capitalist 'success' story has just become POTUS, then it is more than welcome on screens. **ELENA LAZIC**



The Student

Directed by **KIRILL SEREBRENNIKOV**

Starring **PYOTR SKVORTSOV, VIKTORIYA ISAKOVA, ALEKSANDRA REVENKO**

Released **28 FEBRUARY**

Going through puberty is a rough time for any adolescent. For Veniamin (Pyotr Skvortsov), the star of Kirill Serebrennikov's *The Student*, teenage angst manifests itself as a religious tirade. His violent dedication to Christianity is treated as something new – a reflection of Vladimir Putin's 2013 enforcement of religious teachings in schools.

If you're feeling out of touch with scripture, then this film will replenish any lost knowledge. It includes live annotations of Bible passages which appear every time our unlikable leading lad makes a quotation. The text is integrated into the scene, whether it's inscribed on a chalkboard or the walls of a gymnasium. There's a big contradiction within the Russian school system that Serebrennikov's film explores. Teachers blindly accept a strict religious syllabus, yet they discipline the boy for following them in the obsessive manner he does. The most centred character is his Biology teacher (Viktoriia Isakova) who is sensitive to religion and open to scientific teachings despite adversity from conservative colleagues and the explosive Veniamin.

It soon becomes clear that Veniamin's insistent views extend to homophobia and anti-semitism. Yet his outbursts and the ill treatment he receives from his family do become wearying. Some eruptions are actually rather funny, like when he strips naked in protest at having to place a condom on a carrot, or his acting like a 2001 primate to stand up against evolution.

The only glimpse of human empathy we see is his brief romantic involvement with Lidiya (Aleksandra Revenko) who he soon ditches in favour of the cross he holds over his shoulder like a bindle. *The Student* is stimulating when trying to decipher the rationale of the troubled high school boy who has looming ariel shots hovering over him as if being watched by God. A haunting ending that lands a sucker punch from out of nowhere makes the narrative seem very real and rounds off the film in a heart-breaking manner. **TOM WILLIAMS**

ANTICIPATION. *The story of an angry Russian boy obsessed with religion – sounds interesting enough.*

3

ENJOYMENT. *A scintillating, well told tale.*

3

IN RETROSPECT. *Still shaking from that shock ending.*

3



Patriots Day

Directed by **PETER BERG**

Starring **MARK WAHLBERG, MELISSA BENOIST, MICHELLE MONAGHAN**

Released **24 FEBRUARY**

Peter Berg's idea of patriotism finds its clearest, most convincing articulation in *Patriots Day*, a new film which recreates the 2013 Boston marathon bombing and the manhunt that followed. The film shows the incident from all sides, intertwining the stories of victims, police and the bombers themselves with remarkable narrative clarity and a low-key style. But despite its matter-of-fact approach towards senseless terror, there emerges not a sense of defeat but rather the overwhelming feeling of solidarity amongst Bostonians. More interestingly, this version of patriotism is also realised in the film's form. Far from being an insensitive abuse of real tragedy for the purpose of entertainment, *Patriots Day's* large scale re-enactment does some justice to the pain of Boston citizens and to the strength of their community. Emotions do not emanate from an artificially melodramatic treatment, rather Berg's realist style restores to the events their original intensity. Be it the emotion of the attack or the undeniable thrill of the manhunt, the film works both as thriller and drama.

This realistic treatment makes *Patriots Day* an incredibly effective antidote to the numbing indifference encouraged by purely factual, emotionally distant news reports. Almost inadvertently, the film reveals this pessimistic attitude as a way to exempt oneself of responsibility towards others. The film's humanity is all the more moving in a year defined by division. Making a convincing case for the humanistic potential of fictional re-staging, Berg's film throws into question the idea that dramatic reconstitutions are inevitably insensitive. At once a terrific thriller and a socially conscientious plea for solidarity, *Patriots Day* reinvigorates the action film with a sense of social purpose. **ELENA LAZIC**

ANTICIPATION. *Love Peter Berg's films, but could a movie of the Boston bombings be a step too far?*

4

ENJOYMENT. *The fear of an insensitive re-enactment makes the first viewing an anxious if enjoyable experience.*

4

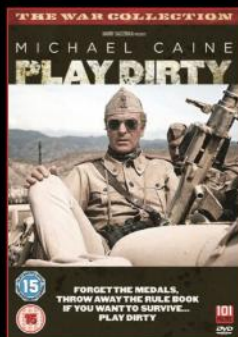
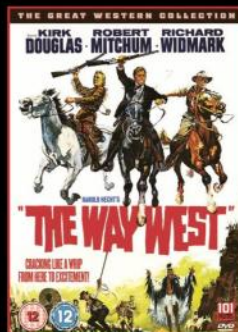
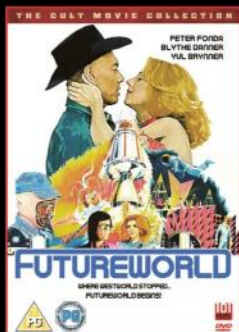
IN RETROSPECT. *Berg deserves more recognition than he gets – he's Michael Bay with a social conscience.*

4



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Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia

| | |
|--|------------------------|
| Directed by SAM PECKINPAH | 1974 |
| Starring WARREN OATES ISELA VEGA ROBERT WEBBER | Released 23 JAN |
| | Blu-ray |

This is a rare case of a movie living up to (and perhaps even exceeding) the promise of its awesome title. Arrow Films have thrown together a very classy package to bring this ultra-seedy, horrendously violent 1974 road movie to the sick masses, and boy does it feel good. Perma-dappled in an inch of glistening sweat, Warren Oates delivers one of his finest performances as a down-and-out barroom piano player whose idea for a get-rich-quick scheme turns out to be one of the poorest decisions he will ever make. A Mexican crime kingpin named El Jefe wants the severed noggin of Alfredo Garcia, a rascal who has knocked up the boss's daughter and fled. Jefe's global network of mercenaries leak this big money opportunity to Oates' Bennie, who shrugs them off before heading to claim the prize for himself.

The film offers a vision of a sand-blasted hell that is so paralysing in its utter bleakness that it's sometimes hard to retain focus. Any sense of hope is short lived as Bennie's life becomes a cavalcade of abuses and torments which eventually send him into an abyss of savagery. Booze and drugs heal all wounds, but not these ones. Like any road movie worth its salt, this one carries with it a chilling existential bent, stating that eventually (and in no uncertain terms) however far we get down the trail, we're all hog chow in the end. The later scenes in which Bennie rides in his beat-up car with only a rotting severed head in a sack for company sees the film take on the tragic grandeur of Greek mythology. As is customary for an Arrow release, this comes with an obscene wealth of added extras, including the 1993 feature-length documentary, *Sam Peckinpah: Man of Iron*, which has never before been released on home video. **DAVID JENKINS**



Ghosts of Mars

| | |
|---|------------------------|
| Directed by JOHN CARPENTER | 2001 |
| Starring NATASHA HENSTRIDGE ICE CUBE CLEA DUVAL | Released 23 JAN |
| | Blu-ray |

At time of writing, *Ghosts of Mars* remains the penultimate feature to bare the hallowed legend: 'A John Carpenter Film'. The cut-price genre maestro made a rather tawdry asylum-set chiller in 2010, named *The Ward*, but otherwise, all his been quiet. This one can be chalked up as a rough-hewn treat for the Carpenterati, but first timers might find it a little rocky going. Set in a future where Mars is in the process of being terraformed by displaced humans, it details a supernatural hiccup which crops up close to the end of this massive colonising endeavour. High-kicking bombshell Natasha Henstridge is posted to a mining outpost to collect and transport the highly dangerous escaped criminal madman, Desolation Williams (Ice Cube). But this being Carpenter, there are bigger, scarier and even more violent fish to fry, causing a temporary accord between lawmakers and lawbreakers. And, for collectors of early Jason Statham performances, this one is a peach – he has a thin glaze of dark hair, and to hear him say “fuck” is an absolute dream.

The director, who also co-writes alongside Larry Sulkis, cheerily plunders his own personal archive and retools ideas and motifs from early classics such as *The Thing*, *Assault on Precinct 13* and *Escape from New York*. The spare production design offers little more than a chess board-like battlefield on which the carnage takes place, while the titular ‘ghosts’ have at our heroes while sporting an array of customised fetishwear and elaborate facial piercings. With its blaring score (Carpenter collaborating with – who else – Anthrax) and repetitive fight sequences, the film now comes across as a feisty and admirably curt precursor to the current swathe of bloated, “dark” superhero movies. For better and for worse.

DAVID JENKINS



The Royal Tenenbaums

| | |
|---|-------------------------|
| Directed by WES ANDERSON | 2001 |
| Starring GENE HACKMAN GWYNETH PALTROW BEN STILLER | Released OUT NOW |
| | Blu-ray |

If you look back at the reviews of Wes Anderson's *The Royal Tenenbaums* upon its release in 2001, they mostly concur on a similar sentiment: why isn't this funnier? It's never nice to read a critique that chides a film for what it isn't rather than what it is, but one thing is true – this film isn't very funny. It has funny moments, and there are two comic titans (Bill Murray and Owen Wilson) both operating at the very peak of their game ("Wildcat! Wild... cat!"), but Anderson is aiming for something darker, something more emotional and sincere. It's a film which explores the interplay between parents and their children. It doesn't just say that only with a happy, honest marriage do children then blossom into rounded citizens. There is lots of complicated give and take, as kids also help to influence both the wellbeing and the destiny of their sometimes misguided folks.

A family of New York-based geniuses succumb to psychological rot when the 'rents, Gene Hackman's huckster patriarch Royal, and Anjelica Huston's nurturing matriarch, Etheline, part ways. The manner in which the film is constructed channels the coping strategies for grief and depression – idle play, being overly fastidious, listening to melancholy rock records, trying to look at the world with an undue sense of rosiness. It perhaps remains the director's most iconic work, the first example of what some might identify as his mature style. It looks every bit as immaculate as the day it was made, from the ambient, slo-mo asides to the precious inserts and inter-titles. Everyone knows that *The Royal Tenenbaums* is meant to be a comedy, but what Anderson presupposes is, maybe it isn't?

DAVID JENKINS



Bunny Lake is Missing

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|--|------------------------|
| Directed by OTTO PREMINGER | 1965 |
| Starring CAROL LYNLEY KEIR DULLEA LAURENCE OLIVIER | Released 20 FEB |
| | Blu-ray |

Even if you're unable to warm to the bleak manhunt storyline that makes up the crooked backbone of this angular thriller, Otto Preminger's *Bunny Lake is Missing* still offers an evocative and eerie vision of north London in the '60s that should not be missed. From the dingy, shoebox-sized flats and tumbledown schools to the smoky pubs and even a very scary 'hospital for dolls' in which one key scene takes place, it stands as one of the great London location shoots of the era. Carol Lynley excels as anxiety-prone American immigrant Ann Lake, whose young daughter Bunny doesn't turn up at the school gates come home time. An inspector, played by Lawrence Olivier, is immediately called to the scene, but the question of the girl's whereabouts plays second fiddle to the notion that she might not actually exist at all.

Mitigating circumstances collude in making Ann seem liked a confused maniac, and in her hour of desperation she's unable to find anything that corroborates that Bunny is a living, breathing human. While the outcome may seem a tad fanciful, it's intention of presenting a woman who is abused by all the men she comes into contact with makes it a film whose enlightened gender politics remain ahead of the curve. You could even see this as a partner feature to Roman Polanski's London-set paranoia classic, *Repulsion*. The most wretched of her male callers is seen in a sequence where Ann is forced to confront her leering landlord, played by Noël Coward, as he attempts to slither his way into her undergarments. The release contains new interviews with Lynley and Clive Revill, who plays one of the policemen, plus a new essay by noted Preminger scholar, Chris Fujiwara. DAVID JENKINS



Donnie Darko

| | |
|---|-----------------------|
| Directed by RICHARD KELLY | 2001 |
| Starring JAKE GYLLENHAAL JENA MALONE MARY MCDONNELL | Released 9 JAN |
| | Blu-ray |

Lord knows what the history books will eventually have to say about the American director Richard Kelly, if anything at all. No, that's unfair. There will be a paragraph on the beautiful mad folly that is his 2001 debut feature *Donnie Darko*, a film that seemingly emanated from a random fissure in time and, to this day, exists as a romantic, morose outlier, much like its eponymous hero. We celebrated its 10th anniversary, so now it's time to celebrate the big one-five, as a slick new 4K restoration of the film is wheeled out just in time for the party. In this package comes both the theatrical and director's cut, the latter probably for pure curiosity value as it is fairly awful. In fact, it stands as a neat symbol of Kelly's inability as a writer and director to see the wood for the trees, an impulse that led to the unshapely apocalyptic horrorshow that is its follow-up, *Southland Tales*.

But revisiting the slimline theatrical cut is a like remembering a lucid dream, and for the first hour at least it would be easy to convince yourself that Kelly is up there with someone like Paul Thomas Anderson (indeed, this does feel a lot like a sci-fi riff on *Magnolia*). Plus lead Gyllenhaal has never really topped his turn as the irascible emo kid whose depression and desperation are made manifest in the form of a dimension-hopping freak rabbit called Frank. Even if the film does start to fray at the seams during its latter stages, you watch in awe as Kelly whisks up an entire community of believable characters out of the brisk smalltown air. He's clearly a sensational multi-tasker, able to merge styles, ideas, theories and genres with relative ease. Yet he is also a filmmaker who just doesn't know when to say no. **DAVID JENKINS**



His Girl Friday

| | |
|--|------------------------|
| Directed by HOWARD HAWKS | 1940 |
| Starring ROSALIND RUSSELL CARY GRANT RALPH BELLAMY | Released 16 JAN |
| | Blu-ray |

When you see a film described as 'screwball', it means that it's about people who converse at an ungodly speed. Sometimes to the point where the answer to a question is delivered before the question is fully posed. Howard Hawks' 1940 comedy, *His Girl Friday*, is often considered the screwball lodestone, with characters speaking so quickly that the words begin to sound like abstract blurts of white noise. Cary Grant's silver-tongued, eyebrow-popping newspaper editor Walter Burns is a scheming rotter, intent on preventing his ex-wife and hotshot reporter Hildy Johnson (Rosalind Russell) from ditching the thrill of the front page to up sticks with Ralph Bellamy's dullard heel. Though the film is deemed to be one of the glimmering jewels of classic era comedy, it does also come off as a cold exercise in pure technical gamesmanship. What's being said takes a back seat to how it's being said, and while there's miraculous skill on show in terms of actors reciting huge blocks of rapid-fire text, it's tough to not just let the words blow through your ears like snappy, staccato bleats. You could imagine a director like Alejandro González Iñárritu getting a kick out of a film like this, as he is someone who likes to take on harebrained formal challenges in the name of empty bombast. It's based on a play by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur called *The Front Page*, and it's easy to see the frantic appeal of the material when delivered live and in one breathless "take". But as a film? If you're someone who values high-wire skill above all else, then definitely nab this disc now, but there's no denying that it's as shallow as puddle. This new Criterion package comes loaded with juicy extras, including a newly restored version of Lewis Milestone's 1931 feature *The Front Page*, and new writing on the film by the always-excellent Farran Smith Nehme. **DAVID JENKINS**



Variété

| | |
|--|------------------------|
| Directed by EA DUPONT | 1925 |
| Starring EMIL JANNINGS MALY DELSCHAFT LYA DE PUTTI | Released 23 JAN |
| | Blu-ray |

British moviegoers will likely recognise the name of director EA Dupont as the maker of the salacious 1929 film *Piccadilly*, which offered an early glimpse of London's colourful cabaret dance club scene through the eyes of Chinese-American starlet, Anna May Wong. Masters of Cinema expand our intimacy with this notable silent filmmaker by releasing this macabre tale of violent jealousy set in the world of erotic spectacle (aka, Berlin). Emil Jannings goes big and bold as "Boss" Huller, a convicted murderer who, after a decade behind bars, eventually decides to relinquish the guilt stored up inside him. Once, back in a more innocent time, he was one half of a trapeze artist act with seductress Bertha-Marie (Lya De Putti). So smitten was he by her charms, that he left his wife and child to be by her side.

You could see *Variété* as a trial run for Josef von Sternberg's *The Blue Angel*, itself about a man (also played by Jannings) hypnotised by supple young flesh and then eventually cuckolded for all to see. The way in which Dupont folds in the death-defying antics of the trapeze act adds an layer of tension to proceedings, as they are engaged in an occupation where their very lives hang on the bond of loving trust between them. Indeed, the film's ultimate message seems to be, if you're looking to fool around with multiple partners, you're probably not best suited to be working in Vaudeville. It's a story as old as the hills, filled out with characters who are all fragile, immoral and destined for high tragedy. This new Blu-ray edition comes with new contextual writing on the film, plus a choice of musical accompaniments, including a controversial one by the British punk trio The Tiger Lillies that ruffled feathers when it was premiered at the 2015 Berlin Film Festival. **DAVID JENKINS**



La Bamba

| | |
|---|-----------------------|
| Directed by LUIS VALDEZ | 1987 |
| Starring LOU DIAMOND PHILLIPS ESAI MORALES ROSANNA DESOTO | Released 9 JAN |
| | Blu-ray |

It's interesting to see that, nearly 30 years ago, filmmakers were making biographies of rock musicians in exactly the same way they do now. In the case of Chicano rocker, Ritchie Valens, the circle of his life had closed some time ago, as he was was a passenger on the downed plane that also killed Buddy Holly and The Big Bopper on that fateful night of 3 February, 1959. And so with hindsight, the clues and inferences can be parlayed into drama, such as the moment in his childhood when he witnessed a fighter jet explode over head and falling debris crush his best friend, leading to a life-long fear of flying. Yet hokey portent aside, Luis Valdez's film is also about the daily struggles of dirt-poor Mexican immigrants moving to California in the 1950s in search of upward mobility

Filipino actor Lou Diamond Phillips, in his first starring role, plays Valens as an incorrigible nice guy. Music is his passion above all else, but success is just a means to an end – to be able to pamper his family. While the film traces his curtailed eight month career in the limelight, it also takes time to look at the life of his older brother Bob (Esai Morales), who is a far more conflicted and interesting character. Bob's repeated attempts to drag himself form the gutter are scuppered by raging jealousy, especially as Ritchie's preternatural talent help him to rise to the top extremely quickly. It does look and feel like a TV movie, and director Valdez very seldom strays from the prestige biopic template. Its worst trait is the fact that, even though these were musicians who seldom wrote songs that exceeded three minutes, all the musical performances here are cut off half way through. Which is doubly annoying seeing as they're the toe-tapping highlights of the film. **DAVID JENKINS**



A postcard from the 2016 Los Cabos Film Festival

While Donald Trump spoke of building a wall between the US and Mexico during his toxic election campaign, the organisers of the Los Cabos International Film Festival, situated at the southernmost tip of the Baja California peninsula, were busy breaking down barriers. In light of recent events, 'Come and see what the neighbours are doing' now feels like a somewhat unfortunate strapline for a festival which prides itself on the accessibility and inclusivity of its line-up. But it's encouraging to witness first hand the festival's ongoing commitment to strengthening the relationship between the North and Central American film industries. It's not just an exotically-located networking event though, there's great films on offer too. This year's hot ticket was undoubtedly Kenneth Lonergan's awards-tipped *Manchester by the Sea*, which screened alongside a host of festival circuit favourites including Andrea Arnold's *American Honey*, Antonio Campos' *Christine* and Pablo Larraín's *Jackie*.

Away from the main programme, special presentations of Babak Anvari's *Under the Shadow*, Kleber Mendonça Filho's *Aquarius*, Michael Dudok de Wit's *The Red Turtle* and Rafi Pitt's *Soy Nero* emphasised the festival's global scope. The latter tells the poignant story of a young man who grew up in the US but now finds himself back in his native Mexico, without a passport and unable to cross the border. As an alien, the surest way for Nero (Johnny Ortiz) to secure the green card he so desperately desires is to enlist in the US Army via a shady government scheme called the 'DREAM Act' (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors). Things go predictably awry when Nero is deployed to Afghanistan, and this initially promising migrant drama from Iran writer/director Pitts stalls before closing on a satisfying visual bookend.

Despite its international flavour, Los Cabos also supports plenty

of homegrown talent, with Rodrigo Cervantes's France-set coming-of-age *Landscapes* and Sebastián Hiriart's metaphysical romantic thriller *Carrion* showing that domestic cinema is in good health. Another big draw was the Tribute sidebar, which toasted ace Mexican cinematographer Rodrigo Prieto (*The Wolf of Wall Street*, *Beautiful*, *Lust*, *Caution*) and American firebrand Oliver Stone, whose films *JFK* and *Salvador* played at the festival. Stone's new film *Snowden* received its Mexican premiere in Los Cabos, but inevitably it was another controversial political figure who dominated the conversation at a ceremonial press conference. He may not be the vigorous, volatile force he once was, but Stone was good value here, expressing his total contempt for the ruling elite and referring to Trump as both "a rebel" and "a smart man [who] doesn't want war."

The festival does a good job, too, of opening up many of its events and screenings to the general public; though not every screening at the central Cinemex multiplex sold out, the tickets were affordably priced and it was great to see local schools attending en masse. (You really haven't experienced a Terrence Malick film properly until you've done so with 150 awestruck school kids.) Education may not be at the top of the festival's agenda, but the well-curated Green strand proved surprisingly popular with ordinary punters – and not just *Voyage of Time*. Austrian director Ulrich Seidl puts mankind's destructive relationship under his misanthropic microscope in *Safari*, a curious film which frankly gives a little too much oxygen to some deeply disturbed trophy-hunting tourists. More conventional but no less unsettling is Morgan Spurlock's *Rats*, a forensic, at times stomach-turning look at how the world came to be overrun with these industrious vermine. Shot and edited like a horror movie, it's a film that will make you squirm without threatening to leave you any more enlightened than when you entered the theatre 🐀



A preview of the 2017 Glasgow Film Festival

Look north from London, and the city of Glasgow comes into your sightlines. You'll see a place that is doing film festivals right. Very quietly, artistic co-directors of the Glasgow Film Festival, Allison Gardner and Alan Hunter, have been building an audience of newbie cinephiles with a programme that skims the best of bubbling-under world cinema while placing old classics into sparkling new context. We spoke to them about the tricky business of planning an executing a modern film festival.

LWLies: When you come together to plan the festival, what is the first order of business?

Alan Hunter: Normally we run away from each other and lie in a dark room until the memories of the last festival have faded. It is a rolling, year-round thing, so even when we're focusing on the 2017 festival, there are already ideas that are floating round for 2018 or certain anniversaries that may be coming up. There's not a moment when you sit down with a blank piece of paper and it's like, 'okay, let's see what we're going to do for 2017'.

Allison Gardner: And we also do look at what has worked and what hasn't. Does the festival tell people anything? What are people interested in? We look back at what's happened and we plan a route forward.

AH: The two obvious things that we do early on is to decide on a country focus for the coming year and also the retrospective.

How do you judge past successes? AG: We introduce films, talk to audiences, so we listen to what people have to say. People will occasionally come up and say, 'Oh God Alison that film was terrible, I don't know even know why you showed that,' and I'll say, 'Alan chose that one'. It's great to have a co-director.

AH: Always someone to blame.

AG: Exactly. We take on the nice comments as well. We look at what people came to see, so a bit of statistical analysis. We look at postcodes, for example, to see how we can reach people in certain areas. More logistics than programming. We feel we've got the ethos right about the festival being for the audience. That's not going to change and I feel we've got the right balance, with high end red carpet galas alongside fantastic, interesting, first-time and second-time features. It seems to be pleasing the audience.

Are festivals still a vital part of the film viewing landscape? AH: It's a weird thing because in some respects people are saying that the cinema experience is over. It's only going to be a blockbuster, *Doctor Strange*-type audience for movies in cinemas. Elsewhere we're all going to be streaming things and watching things on devices. On the other hand, it seems to be a vibrant time for festivals and watching films on the big screen and in places that you would never normally get to see a film. We do special events in landmark areas like Glasgow Cathedral. The whole communal experience of laughing, crying, experiencing emotions together in a big place – it doesn't strike me that that it's ever going to go away.

AG: Yeah, I would definitely second what Alan is saying. Running the Glasgow Film Theatre all year round as well, that helps us to know what people are coming to see. Audience numbers are growing and people are wanting more shared experiences. In the current climate, with everything that's been going on in the last couple of months, that sense of community is actually more important now to be honest. People don't want escapism necessarily, but they want to see great films programmed by a festival which they know cares, curates and looks after them 🍷

The Glasgow Film Festival, 15–25 February, 2017, glasgowfilm.org/festival

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| <h1>Escape to Victory</h1> | |  |
| <p>- DIRECTED BY -</p> <p><i>John Huston</i></p> | <p>- STARRING -</p> <p><i>Sylvester Stallone</i> <i>Michael Caine</i> <i>Max von Sydow</i></p> | |
| <p>- TRAILERS -</p> <p><i>A Blunder Down Under Chainsaws From Nowhere The Rimini Protocol</i></p> | <p>- CHERRYPICK -</p> <p><i>“I want you to empty out that ball bag and start shooting as hard as you can, lads. Go on, give ’im everything you’ve got!”</i></p> | |
| <p>- TAGLINE -</p> <p><i>‘Football Must Put An End To War Before War Puts An End To Football’</i></p> | | |

| |
|---------------------------------|
| <p>- RELEASED -</p> <p>1981</p> |
|---------------------------------|

Do you know what *Escape to Victory* is? Chances are that it's a 50/50 split between twerking phablet skidmarks who don't know a tweet from a twot, and those of an uncertain age who quote from it daily, screen it every bank holiday afternoon and find more meaning, motivation and mileage in it than in God's own bible. Between those who question the mechanics of its title – how exactly does one escape to victory? – and those for whom it is an irradicable fractal of shared cultural heritage. For some it is – to quote Muhammad Ali – bigger than Evel Knievel and the Kentucky Derby on the same day. Half of you won't know what an Evel Knievel is. That's okay. A recent poll showed that 71 per cent of millennials have never heard of Napster, sandwich toasters or Chumbawamba.

Films like *Escape to Victory* are sedimentary boundaries that separate one generation from another. They are silver nitrate rivers across which no torch can be passed. They are 'Dad Movies'. Grappling hooks, lashings of non-consensual sex, ingrained racism, gold bullion, Nazis, suspension bridges, she-Nazis, arms deals, searchlights, barrack room high-jinks, cable cars, plutonium deposits, the Cold War, safari suits, torture, the Knights Templar, Richard Burton, tanks, brothels, those furry Russian hats, rinky-dink Italian sports cars, Zeppelins, semi-consensual sex and football. These are the hallmarks of the Dad Movie.

Or, to put it another way, your father's fantasy life if he hadn't settled for a comfy life with your mother (and by extension, sired you, you worthless rimshot!). Dad Movies red-line with priapic dissatisfaction, tooled-up boys-only excursions, a longing for childhood codes, automatic weapons and maltreated Third World hotties desperate for a cleansing night of rumpy-pumpy with a gallant Western rogue. But the Dad Movie is a timebomb – ironically another staple of the genre – and it ticks for us all. Man, woman and child.

Based on the 1962 Hungarian film *Half-Time with Hitler*, *Escape to Victory* is a World War Two romp in which two captured prisoners of war (Sly Stallone and Michael Caine) train a team of Allied soldiers to take on the might of the German football machine in a rigged propaganda game. Lucky for them, among their first 11 is are World Cup winners Bobby Moore and Pelé. They eventually manage to take the Hermanns to a 4-4 draw, yet in doing so, win a bigger victory (which, to appease US audiences' conception of soccer, is achieved via endless slo-mo overhead kicks). They could have escaped at half-time, but – thanks to classic Dad Quote from Ipswich Town destroyer Russell Osman, “C'mon boys – we can win this!” – return to the pitch and make an Eton mess of Mr Goebbels' publicity stunt. This leads us to that most indelible of Dad tropes – the retardation of adolescence. Faced with the opportunity to escape the matey unisex boarding school in which they lark so merrily and return to their families, this band of chums chooses the communal showers and regimented horseplay of their cosy little clubhouse.

But time's winged chariot (Dad's love chariots) waits for no-one. The age of the Dad Movie is over, its devotees now scattered and ravaged. Everyone has an older workmate, shuffling neighbour or damp-eyed father whose cultural currency is looking a bit shabby. Whose references to 'the Atom bomb', skiffle, Dirk Bogarde or 'key parties' are getting increasingly oblique. Or maybe you don't. Maybe it's your continued references to '90s rom-coms or block-quoting from *Easy Rider* and wearing a fringed leather jacket on Dress Down Friday that's drawing befuddled sniggers from around the office. If that's the case you might do well to remember the old poker maxim: if you look around the table and you can't tell who the sucker is, it's you. Tick, tick, tick... 🕒

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TONI ERDMANN

A FILM BY **MAREN ADE**

IN CINEMAS FEB 3

Logo of the German Film Commission, supported by the German Federal Government and the German States

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LWLIES:

What do you love about movies?

MAREN ADE:

It can be a big relief to go to the cinema sometimes because you escape your own life, your own thoughts. For me, it's always nice to meet - or I always hope to meet - a good author. Or not only to see a film but also, when I step out of the cinema, that my view on things or on the world is changed a bit, or is enriched by the perspective of the author I just met. That's sometimes a good relief.

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